

Chapter 12

CULTURE, NATION, SOCIETY

Secondary change and fundamental transformations in Western Samoa

Towards a model for the study of cultural dynamics

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The belief that we can observe and translate the identity of a culture directly is no doubt an illusion. At first everything we see seems to speak of a certain cultural identity simply because everything seems alien to the outside observer and therefore to call for new categories. In these conditions how can we classify the material without projecting onto it what is, a priori for our culture, an alien culture? Secondly, no society is exempt from the effects of history and daily changes. But to speak of transformations — in the diachronic sense — is no easier. How can anthropologists integrate this dimension when they often spend only a few years ‘in the field’. Furthermore, depending on the observer’s distance, close up — say an individual or a life-history — or further away — for instance a system of obligatory social relations (taboos, laws) — the periodicity of change and its logic will appear very different. So what distance should we favour?

When the object of study readily lends itself to projection, the solution is not to tell ourselves that we will achieve greater objectivity by paying greater attention. This would be another illusion, only confirming our projections as we went. The solution is to state our conditions and methodological choices clearly so as to enable the observer to make a preliminary choice. Some ethnocentric projection is inevitable because the observer does not stand ‘above’ the human societies that provide the material for observation; he is an integral part of society. But he will make use of that which at least serves the manner in which anthropology initially defines its ethical position with respect to the other.

As far as I am concerned, this choice is dictated by a general conception of the ‘comparative’ relationship implied when an observer, in the name of social science — and therefore in the name of the Western value known as ‘universalism’ — attempts to translate the reality, however mobile, of a particular society and therefore the reality of a concrete local totality.¹ To speak of identity and of changes in this identity supposes accepting the idea that societies and cultures exist, and that each constitutes a particular reality. Universalism is at the same time a necessity on the ethical level and an obstacle when it comes to talking directly about a concrete reality, which every ‘society’ (whether remote or Western) is. I have therefore chosen to define the idea of a particular society in contrast to the logic implied in the universalistic idea of humankind. The latter reasons in terms of a group considered as a collection of elements, *prior to being considered as a collectivity* defined as to their nature, such that each element (‘human being’) represents in the same manner the entire set (‘humankind’). I posit, on the contrary, that the characteristic feature of an individual society is first of all the phenomenon by which all individuals express and practise their *belonging* to a single *whole*, the latter being narrower than the set of all human beings: ‘we are...’, ‘I do this because my ancestors did it...’, and so forth.

To speak of belonging to the same ‘whole’ is to speak of a *hierarchical* system, for here precisely we are no longer in a logic of the collection: one can be seen to belong because one occupies one or more *ranks* which, though not meaningful in themselves, immediately take on meaning when placed in a context, in other words in relation to other positions occupied at the same moment by other individuals. Rank is the different possibility each person has to represent to a certain extent the whole for the others. Hierarchy is a global phenomenon: there is always a difference between two ranks, between two positions involved in belonging to the same whole (two identical positions would mean a single belonging, a single social subject.²) Defined in this way, the notion can be applied to even the most ‘egalitarian’ societies, those ‘without (centralised) power’, and so on, for I am not talking about the kind of inequality in which the difference precedes the relation. I am talking about the fact that all of the individuals belong to one space, conceived as a unified place, but in which all positions are different.

An eloquent visual example of this is the way people throughout Western Polynesia arrange themselves when they come together in a socially recognised group: they form into circle — Samoans speak of a ‘sacred circle’ (*alofi sa*). This figure is well suited to showing a single belonging: each person sits around the circumference and at the same distance from the centre, which is the place of the divine.³ Yet the circle is oriented, simultaneously and contrary to the geometry we are familiar with, by axes of value which divide the circumference into clearly differentiated arcs. Within these arcs, each point is different from the next. In Samoa, these points are represented by the posts that hold up the conical roof of the ceremonial house, itself comprised of a circular base, a circle of posts and a roof, with no internal partitions.

A social system, and therefore a system of belonging to a whole and therefore a hierarchical system, can be identified by the fact that it is a system of prohibitions sharing a single belief about the content of and the reasons for these prohibitions, but operating on a graduated scale: the highest ranks are those carrying the greatest number of prohibitions.

Prohibitions affect the way the highest ranking person enters into contact with those of lower rank, for instance the caste system in India, or the way those of lower rank come into contact with the highest-ranking person: this is the Polynesian taboo.

In this methodological perspective, the major transformation marking the passage from one period of identity to another is one which modifies the system's rules for belonging — in this case I will speak of 'fundamental transformation'. The social revolution is a type-case; for Europe, one has only to think of 1789 or 1917. In the case of Samoa, things are not that simple. Whether before or after Christianization (roughly 1830–1860), before, during or after the colonial period (1899–1962), before or after introduction of the modern school system of the 1950s (patterned, but only partially, on the European model), the system of belonging remained by and large unchanged. Briefly, since we will be coming back to the subject, we are talking about the '*matai* (title) system', the *faamatai*: a hierarchy of ancestral names associated with lands. These names, known as '*matai* names' (*o suaʻafa o matai*), define 'family' groups (*aiga*): all those affiliated with this kind of name and who display this attachment. These names are transmitted in the same way as the aristocratic titles; hence the fact that the anthropological literature speaks of 'titles',⁴ the term used by Samoans when speaking English; but in Samoan, they speak of '*matai* names'. The name is carried by the person who has been elected and formally invested with the name by the family, *aiga*, and who then becomes the *matai* of the family; I will use this term (the literature uses chief, high chief, title-holder). These are not 'aristocratic' titles, however, since all families in Samoa, without exception, are *aiga* defined around such a name; the 'chiefs' are family heads, and no one is left out because everyone belongs to at least one family.

This is a properly social phenomenon. Such names do not simply form a mythic stock which harks back to the history of each family. At every generation, they form a global, country-wide hierarchy — the official order of all ancestral names — made visible, enacted and verbally expressed by the *matai*, all those individuals invested with one of these names. The *matai* make numerous decisions concerning everyone; but because their authority is exercised on behalf of the ancestors they personify, the result is that, at each generation, a hierarchy is recomposed which forms the basis of the whole social organisation governing families, the village, land-holding and politics. Samoa is famous throughout the South Pacific for their enduring '*matai* system'.⁵ Of course we will see that there have been many secondary changes — those not affecting the principles of the system. We will also see that, since 1990, in other words very recently, there has been a deep-seated modification of the system of political representation which may pave the way for a fundamental transformation. But in the meantime the long-term identity remains unchanged: the hierarchical logic is still the same, as are the forms of social belonging which make up this hierarchy.

We therefore need a more complete model which takes account of secondary changes.⁶ These cannot be left to one side because they are the gateway for the event, however tenuous, which may later work its way into the whole, eventually laying the groundwork for the fundamental transformations that will affect the first level of the configuration, that is the system of belonging.⁷ In any event, observation demands this complement. It is clear that everything we observe is not only the hierarchical fact of belonging and the ways it is enacted, however complex and varied these may be, as in the case of the system of Polynesian

titles. Individuals also do a host of other things, which appear to be something else because they are no longer explained by the hierarchy and even sometimes seem to run counter to it. We must pay close attention to these contexts, for they provide a ready entry for new elements and change. But because they are not central to the phenomena of belonging, they more often escape the attention of the interested parties: these are areas in which people acknowledge that things ‘just happen’, either by chance or because they are felt to be inherent properties of people and things.

We will return to this in the second part of the article, devoted to the question of change. For the moment, however, let us turn to the question of identity.

Identity: the sacred circle

Although I will keep the singular of this term, since I am talking about contemporary identity, the kind I observed, I will distinguish three categories, based respectively on the Samoan culture, on the existence of a national State, Western Samoa, and last, on the social system which brings all people together into a single hierarchical system of belonging, the ‘*matai* system’. In each case, we will find the figure of the circle, which organises the system of belonging and so maintains the feeling of identity.

Cultural identity: faaSamoa

In the South Pacific, east of Wallis and Futuna (French territory), northwest of the Fiji islands, southeast of Tuvalu, north of the islands of Tonga (each of these three names designates at once an archipelago, a cultural identity and an independent State) lies a group of islands whose some 200,000 inhabitants, whenever they happen to meet coming from different villages and islands, all use strictly the same language, the same way of greeting each other, of inviting everyone to sit down in a circle to talk, eat and so forth. Even more astonishing, they immediately or rapidly agree on the order of precedence, even if the meeting is impromptu: the seating order in the house where they meet, the speaking order, the order in which drink and food are served,⁸ etc. If someone from outside the archipelago is present, he will always hear the same cultural discourse of ‘us’ versus ‘you’ in response to his questions: ‘Here we do things this way.’ In this discourse, the term that accompanies the ‘our way’ of doing this or that is *faaSamoa*,⁹ ‘the Samoan way’.

There is thus an awareness of a Samoan cultural identity. A very strong awareness, in fact; Samoans are constantly glorifying the *faaSamoa*; yet another phenomenon famous throughout the South Pacific.¹⁰ This observation about awareness of an identity is amply confirmed in the immigrant communities which have left these little Pacific States to find work in Australia, New Zealand, or on the West Coast of the United States and in the American state of Hawaii. There too one hears the same discourse whenever people meet who recognise themselves in the *faaSamoa*, which means whenever they come from this group of islands we can thus designate as the archipelago and the culture area of the ‘Samoan islands’.¹¹

To this mutual recognition by insiders (‘our *faaSamoa*’) must be added the attitude shared towards outsiders, those who, by their origin and their inability to understand Samoan, show that they do not come from this circular world where the way of life is the

faaSamoa but where the language too is the *faaSamoa*, for this is also the word — there is no other way of saying it — Samoans use to qualify their language with respect to other languages.

Their neighbours, first of all, have been known from time immemorial and feature frequently in the war legends and the genealogies tracing marriages between high-ranking families: the immediate neighbours are Fiji and Tonga. They, too, are ‘humans’, *tagata*, and therefore products of the same Creator, Tagaloa-a-Lagi, the traditional chief god of this region;¹² but their way of life and language are the *faaFiti* (Fijian) and the *faaToga* (Tongan). Categories of broader regional identity, such as ‘Polynesian’ or ‘Pacific islander’, and the ‘Pacific Way’ are still infrequent, outside intellectual and government circles that is. Beyond that, Samoans used to know nothing through their own tradition, since it told them that the ‘world’ (*lalolagi*, ‘that which lies beneath the sky’) was bounded by the celestial vault (the *lagi*, in fact several layers of curved heavens, the dwellings of the gods). Recent history has introduced them to *Tama uli*, ‘black boys’, some hundreds of Melanesian workers imported by a few European settlers in the nineteenth century; however, these workers, who have all but disappeared today and whom many young people have never encountered as a group, were not really ‘human’ in the social sense.¹³ History has also introduced Samoans to the *Tama seina*, ‘Chinese boys’, another group of indentured labourers imported in the twentieth century. Here history took a different course. Asians numbered a few thousand, intermarriage was frequent, a Chinese business quarter grew up in Apia; but the New Zealand government forcibly repatriated many in the name of a concern typical of the time (the 1920s), the preservation of the ‘purity’ of the Samoan ‘race’.¹⁴ The merchant quarter still exists, but its population is heavily mixed; there are also a number of merchant families of mixed blood and a few mixed-blood children in Samoan families in the villages. All these families speak Samoan in the home; the children one notices here or there are the same as other children, even if it is known that their grandfather was one of those workers; and the only teasing that can be heard among children is the phrase *mata seina*, ‘Chinese eyes’.¹⁵

Last of all there is the Papalagi, the European, the first foreigner to land on the shores of these islands (if one excepts Fijians and Tongans). The term Papalagi which designates this foreigner is still in use today. It is the common word, pronounced without a thought as to its possible etymology which, if accurate, still indicates the huge distance, in cosmological terms, that Samoans attributed to the original home of this newcomer: he is the one from the confines of the celestial circle.¹⁶ To be sure, his quasi-divine status is considerably diminished, but the European remains a special, problematic being. He is lauded because he belongs to the people who brought the ‘good word’ — and Christianity, at least what it became when it was adopted by the Samoans, is today one of the things Samoans refer to as being part of their tradition; he is admired (but that is all) for his technological achievements; but he is almost scorned for his inability to live in ‘society’ (what Samoans call *nuu*) and to understand the ‘social’ facts of others (personal notes). This image of the Papalagi is even more pejorative in the mouth of intellectuals or politicians (at least those in power until the mid-1980s),¹⁷ who see him as a plunderer of cultural treasures (he collects data and then publishes ‘absurdities about our way of life, our politics, the grammar of our language’) and as someone who has no social values, an ‘individualist’ (in the ordinary sense of the word), and so forth.

Comment

On the question of cultural plunder, this acerbic criticism clearly comes from a few intellectual or academic circles. The example often cited by these Samoans is Margaret Mead's book on adolescence in Samoa (1928) which many regard as a tissue of 'lies' (*pepelo*).

Concerning the criticism of European social life and Europeans' inability to understand what a 'society' is about, that is a life organised in the manner of a *nuu* (village in the sense of a set of those who belong, see below), the view is much more widespread and each person has a more-or-less shaded opinion. Everyone — and not only intellectuals and politicians — thinks he knows all about life in Europe (by hearsay: the accounts of many emigrants), whereas, in the early 1980s, the date of my first stay, tourism was non-existent (if one excepts the Australian cruise ships that stopped to allow their passengers to spend a day or two in the capital and its two main hotels, with spectacles featuring local songs and dances). I witnessed, in various villages, the swarms of children observing with a mixture of curiosity and fear the event created by the arrival of a *Papalagi* (the fear came from the fact that mothers often use the image of the *Papalagi* as an ogre to threaten a disobedient child that, if he was not good, she will send for one).

Many things have changed in fifteen years, accelerating rapidly after 1987: electrification, a road system, construction of several hotels, launch of a campaign advertising Polynesian traditions ('Samoa: the cradle of Polynesia') aimed at bringing in tourists, mainly from Australia and New Zealand, but also from the United States and even Europe, where Western Samoa has opened an embassy in Brussels (see below); and recently relying heavily on brochures offering attractive financial conditions to foreign investors.¹⁸

The islands of Samoa thus constitute a homogeneous cultural area, even if their geography and history present some discontinuities. Proceeding from east to west, we find the small cluster of the three islands of Mana'a, the narrow but very long island of Tutuila with its once-important port of Pago Pago,¹⁹ then further west, a group of two large islands (each over 70 km in length), with an area (nearly 3,000 km² for these two alone) and a population (160,000 inhabitants) which makes them the largest territorial group in terms of emerged surface and population in Polynesia:²⁰ Upolu, also with a sheltered port that has recently turned into a regular town (Apia), Savaii, and two little islands located between the larger ones, Apolima and Manono. The tales of war and the genealogies say that Manua ruled all these islands several centuries ago, which means that everyone would have acknowledged the genealogical supremacy of this group's principal *matai* chief title, the *Tui Manua*. At the time of contact this was no longer the case, and the important chiefs of Upolu, Manono and Savaii dominated and frequently waged war on a local scale. Nevertheless, cultural unity persisted, even in the absence of a single, centralised power, with thousands of different *matai* chiefs and ten or so great chiefs around whom the others rallied and to whom they lent their support in the form of food (cultivating gardens, fishing) and warriors.

By a fluke of European colonial policy (the division decided in Berlin in 1899), the eastern islands (Tutuila and the little Manua group) became — and remain today — an

'unincorporated' American territory,²¹ while the western islands came under German control. The latter had been independent until the end of the nineteenth century, but they experienced the gradual establishment of a small population of European settlers (5 per cent of the total population at the start of the twentieth century), who developed the town of Apia, at the north end of Upolu, into a trading post and the headquarters of the various 'consuls' created by the European sub-groups (Germans, English and Americans). Between 1899 and 1914, the islands were a German colony, but the administration hardly had the time to establish a different social organisation. When war broke out, the United Kingdom asked New Zealand to land in Samoa and to retire the German flag; this was done without a struggle, since, in military terms, the German garrison was inexistent. Between 1921 and 1962, the League of Nations (and then the United Nations) placed these islands under New Zealand administration. But this was only a 'mandate' (later a 'Trusteeship') and New Zealand had no plans for a settlement colony. It simply set up a central administration, which had little effect on village organisation, and public schools alongside the already well-established Mission school system.²² In 1962, these islands became an independent State, the first post-colonial State in the South Pacific: Western Samoa.

The administrative division into two Samoas, the State of Western Samoa (pop. 160,000) and the American territory of eastern Samoa (pop. 36,000) had no effect on the cultural unity, which is fully evident today. Indeed, the kinship networks still extend over both Samoas. At life-cycle ceremonies and for every funeral, all living members of this family network (*aiga*), which can run into hundreds of individuals and in all cases at least a few dozen, try to be present.²³ People are therefore constantly meeting and travelling. Contacts between family members within each of the two Samoas are even more frequent on family occasions, to which must be added travel between the village and the administrative centre (Pago Pago for American Samoa and Apia for Western Samoa), and trips into town to sell their garden produce.²⁴

The Samoan language is a vehicle for this constant renewal of community feelings and therefore common identity; while some words may change and new expressions appear owing to modernisation and Westernisation, these changes quickly spread. It must be stressed that, in both Samoas, the Samoan language, the language transmitted by the ancestors, is still spoken by everyone and, in the case of older people, it is often the only language spoken. In Western Samoa, the Samoan language comes first in every setting; in elementary school, on the radio, in the newspapers, in government offices, in Parliament, practically the only language heard or read is Samoan; official documents, however, are bilingual.

Comment

The story could have been very different. After public schooling was expanded by the New Zealand government (the percentage of children in full-time education was already high thanks to the Mission), there was a manifest desire to make English the language of education and therefore that of administration as well. But the New Zealand period did not last long enough: mandate in 1921, creation of a number of schools in the 1930s and 1940s and, at the beginning of the 1950s, the sentiment of imminent independence and therefore room made for the Samoan *cadres*. The years immediately preceding

independence also saw the return of the first scholarship winners (awarded by New Zealand and the Commonwealth), who had left to attend university, who had been able to achieve a Masters degree and even go on to earn a PhD in New Zealand with post-doctoral work in the United States or Europe. The most famous is no doubt Aiono Dr. Fanaafi Le Tagaloa, Foundation Professor at the National University and Samoa's first Ph.D. (obtained in London), appointed upon her return Vice-Director and then Director of National Education, the first Samoan to hold this office. She and others, highly sensitised (by their travels) to the problem of cultural unity and the preservation of the language — in particular in light of the disastrous situation of New Zealand's Maoris — became ardent advocates of the complete Samoanisation of elementary education and the administration, and at the same time proposed lexical rules for integrating new notions, based on Samoan words. The wager paid off, and today the Samoan language is used by everybody, young and old, farmers and the Prime Minister, as the everyday tongue as well as the language of ceremony.²⁵

National identity: *Samoa i sisifo* ('West Samoa')

I will restrict myself here to Western Samoa, which I know best.²⁶ Over the last two centuries — and for longer according to legend — the stakes involved in the *matai* titles as well as the wars seem to have ratified a certain estrangement between the archipelago's western group and its eastern islands. In the west, three or four great names made the history of pre-colonial warfare and held the key posts in the 'native' administration, under New Zealand's rule, with a view to preparing for independence.

'*O le Ao o le Malo*': the head(s) of State

The absence of a single power, mentioned above, was so firmly entrenched in people's minds that it had a consequence that was no doubt unique in the world. In the consultations leading up to independence,²⁷ a Constitution was drafted along European lines, which provided for a parliament (members to be elected by each district: approx. 40), a cabinet (headed by a prime minister), chosen from among the members of Parliament, and a head of State (who was also to be chosen from the body of MP's by election and for a period of five years). But an exception was made to these rules, by constitutional amendment because of the joint presence of two great '*matai*' names (Malietoa and Tupua Tamasese), which had dominated the history of warfare in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had played an important role in relations with the Missions and with the foreign business community, and then had occupied the most important positions in local government under New Zealand's rule. Clearly these two names — and therefore the *matai* who bore them — must hold the supreme office. First of all, it was obvious that the head of State must be a *matai*. The spirit of the Constitution combined the Western idea of democratic political representation with the traditional notion of rank, based on the *matai* system: all members of Parliament would be *matai*. Secondly, to choose one over the other would deeply divide the country. Therefore Malietoa Tanumafili II and Tupua Tamasese Meaole were *both* appointed heads of State, jointly, simultaneously and for life. When one died, the other would continue in office until he too passed away. Only then would the five-year mandate system come into force. Today,

one of the men has died and the other (Malietoa) continues to exercise the charge of head of State, which gives rise to another no doubt unique phenomenon: [in 2004] Malietoa has been head of State for an uninterrupted period of forty-two years! The rest of the system operates as provided in the Constitution, except that the relationship between the idea of the traditional *matai* chief and the voting system set up to elect a parliament has turned out to be awkward, and today holds new dangers, as we will see.

This to us astonishing but altogether Samoan decision shows that the idea of *malo* 'government' (see below) does not stand above the *matai* system. In the *matai* system, rivalry between men of similar rank is usually resolved according to hierarchy. But when the contest occurs at the very top, there remains only one solution, which is extreme: war. That is why one of the first acts of the German colonial government was to create a supreme court of law with the power to decide all matters relating to *matai* titles. This was an essential tool in eliminating traditional warfare. At the time, the high-court German judge could easily decide, rightly or wrongly. Today the situation is more complex because the judges themselves are Samoans; but this Land and Title Court continues to play a very important role in the life of the country.²⁸ When the present head of State (Malietoa) dies, the rivalry between the descendants of the two names (Malietoa and Tupua) will flare up again, but the wars of the nineteenth century are now too far away, and the question will be decided by election. A noteworthy fact: much of this election will be decided outside Parliament, when the extended Malietoa family (which numbers into the thousands) will already have to choose among their members the successor to the title of Malietoa *matai*. Most political rivals since independence (except for the newcomers in the last government) are *matai* whose genealogy dates far back and therefore connects at some point with that of the present Malietoa, one of the oldest families in the country; they are therefore 'heirs to the name' and are eligible to carry the title. The one who is finally vested with the title by the extended family will, as it were, be already chosen for the country's highest office — at least if the national identity we are talking about remains unchanged; if, on the other hand, the future were to show that the *matai* system is no longer the site of all decision-making, including political deliberations, then we would have to conclude that a fundamental transformation is underway.

It is thus not around *one* man or *one* political function that the country builds and lives out its unity, but rather around a number of such men and functions. To explain their order and the fact that, for example, it was impossible to take Tupua without Malietoa, or vice versa, we need to turn again to the ideas governing the *matai* system. It was because these two men were or are among the greatest *matai* that they were dealt with in this manner. It is because the Constitution on the whole is based on a combination of democratic ideas about representation and on the *matai* system that it looks so odd to our Western eyes and, also, that it so effectively ensures a national identity by carrying over into the political institution the fact that a *matai* is a *sacred* representative (in him lives the ancestor who bore the name which became the title passed down in the family), but one who is chosen *democratically* and can be dismissed (theoretically all members of the family are eligible to stand for election). The *matai* represents the family; together with other *matai*, he represents the village; finally, some of them represent the district. It is enough to look at the linchpin of the whole system

as defined by the Constitution: to be a member of Parliament (and therefore eventually of the government or even head of State), one must be a *matai*. Only *matai* can be elected. It must immediately be added: today there are nearly 15,000 *matai* for a population of 160,000; this is therefore no oligarchy closed in upon itself.²⁹

'*O le Malo*': the government

All Samoans one encounters, without exception, are proud of belonging to their country and take true pleasure in repeating the terms that identify them as a nation and a State: *O le Malo Tutoatasi o Samoa i sisifo* (as it appeared until the end of the 1980s on every Samoan's passport). This country has a 'government', it is a country, a 'State'; that is the content of the term *Malo*, which designates the established power, the oneness of authority (a district is *itumalo*, 'one face or one side of power'). In the ordinary sense, the term also designates 'victory' or the 'victor, winner' (in war, in rhetorical competitions). It also means 'guest', which says much about the Samoan duty of hospitality and the welcome extended to the outsider who is the guest of a Samoan family. Lastly, this country is 'independent' (*tutoatasi*; it 'stands [up] by itself'). Many know that it was the first independent State in the South Pacific. And the national holiday, in early June, which commemorates the independence of *Samoa i sisifo* ('West Samoa'), always gives rise to an immense expression of rejoicing in which all villages participate with huge parades and artistic or sporting competitions held on the big ceremonial ground of Apia.

It is not without significance that the government is called the *Malo*. This means that it is the 'winner' (formerly in war, today in the elections), but it also means that, on its own, it would not constitute a level of identity were it not totally immersed in the *matai* system. For alone, all it represents is 'strength', *malosi*. But the country is not founded on 'strength', but on 'God', according to the national motto and the Constitution; and here God is the pinnacle of the *matai* system, both its origin and its reference, the Christian God having taken over the role once played by Tagaloa, the demiurge of Western Polynesia. This comment on the manner of designating the government thus touches on the problem of elections (see below): if the *malo* (and thus politics) were to be separated from the *matai* system, there would be a risk of fundamental transformation.³⁰

As an independent *Malo*, this country has its own 'dignity' and 'place in the order of the world' (*mamalu*). It also has its own 'sanctity' (*paia*), for as the national motto says and the Constitution confirms, this country is 'founded upon God'. Thus every law, every order, every written indication of a legal nature — such as the price of tickets posted in a city bus — is introduced by formulas such as: 'in the name of the dignity and the sanctity of this country, it is forbidden to..., it is permitted ..., the prices are...', and so on. This central reference to 'God' (*O le Atua*) does not stem from the fact that some Mission managed to identify itself with the idea of government. On the contrary, a man who chooses to be a minister or a priest cannot be a *matai* or, if he holds the title, he must give it up. There is a continuity here with the preceding central divine figure, Tagaloa-a-lagi, who was both the pinnacle and the origin of the *matai*. Indeed the oldest title names descend from God, but they have in turn created other names.

This brings us back to the *matai* system, as does the expression for 'country': *atunuu*. When a Samoan, speaking of this State of Western Samoa, says it is his country, or when, as

an emigrant in a distant land, he sings of his nostalgia for his ‘dear country’ (*o lou atunuu pele*), he always uses the word *atunuu*, which signifies literally a ‘deployment of social groups’ — and observation shows that these groups are ordered by the logic of the *matai* system. *Atu* is a term indicating a direction considered from the standpoint of the speaker and moving away from him. Dictionaries usually translate *Nuu* as ‘village’, and Samoa is effectively a ‘country of villages’; there are some 350 of them. Everybody lives in a village (Apia, the capital, is itself a grouping of juxtaposed villages) in the sense that their name, their family and their land are defined as the component parts of a village. There is no larger physical reality. A village is a set (represented as a circle) of relatively closely grouped houses (more accurately, sites where a *matai* name originated) and their surrounding lands, sometimes extending out a great distance, which are in part the lands of each founding house of a name and in part village lands worked in common or not yet allocated. In various places, often invisible to the inexperienced eye, the lands of one village stop, and those of another begin. The district is an electoral division and the Member of Parliament is a village *matai*, like all *matai*.

There are other words for the village as a place to live or an occupied area. Significantly, though, these are seldom used, and it is the word *nuu* that one hears over and over. The village is designated as a *nuu* in the sense that a village is first of all a set of different social groups, each of which is itself a *nuu*. A village is the assemblage of four *nuu*: the group of the village *matai*, the group of the daughters and sisters of the *matai*, the group of the sons and finally the group of the wives.³¹ Each of these groups operates according to a clear set of rules and — essential for our discussion — is modelled on the *nuu* of the *matai*. Cooperation among these four groups accounts for a good share of village life.

Social identity: *aganuu* (faaSamoa)

O le faamatai: the title system

When a Samoan talks about his society in English, he does not differentiate between ‘culture’ and ‘society’, and, as is the habit in Anglo-American, he will even speak more often of ‘culture’. But if he is asked, still in English, to characterise his ‘culture’ in Samoan, once it is clear that the subject is the *faaSamoa* (as opposed to the *faaToga*, for instance, or the *faaPapalagi*, the Tongan way of life and language or those of the Europeans), once it is clear that it is not a question of the history of his ‘country’, *atunuu*, he will say that ‘the essence or the nature of Samoan culture is...’: what follows is usually a list of taboos and duties surrounding the *matai* system and religion, introduced by the phrase: *o le aganuu faaSamoa...*. The term *aganuu*, the dictionary translation of ‘custom’, seems to be only another vocabulary item of the discourse on culture. But, like the concept ‘country’ (*atunuu*), the word ‘custom’ (*aganuu*) refers to the unit of social organisation, the *nuu*, meaning both the groups that make up the village (each of which meets in a circle) and the whole village as these groups taken together. Furthermore, the first root (*aga*) means ‘the essence or the nature’ of something, in the sense of ‘the true place (of this thing) in the overall order of the world’, its meaning at all levels, and so on. In short, custom, that order of things which is the *faaSamoa* (but the term is not obligatory because we are no longer speaking with reference to the neighbour or the outsider, we are speaking of the essence of the *faaSamoa*, we are

speaking from the inside) is ‘the essence of the phenomenon represented by the *nuu*, *aganuu*. But the *nuu* is the realisation, in the organisation of the society, of the order established by the *matai* system.’³² Here I will stress two points: the organisation of the *nuu* is the *matai* system, it is a *system* based on belonging and not a stratification in the village society; secondly, no Samoan is left out of this system of belonging.

The *faamatai* (from now on I will use this term because it is shorter than its translation: ‘the system of *matai* [names]’) is, for everyone, the social system of belonging. Every person, in every social situation (therefore subjected to at least one prohibition and one obligation, and usually to several) acts (in accordance or in conscious and deliberate contradiction) with reference to a ‘place’ (*tulaga*, *nofo*) that he sees himself as occupying with respect to the others present in this situation. We observe that the representation of this place always refers to the place occupied by the *matai* name with which this person is linked, with respect to the other village *matai* names within the ‘circle’ of these names, the ‘*nuu* of the *matai*’. The *faamatai* is therefore not ‘the group of chiefly families’, it is not only the *matai*, the individual ‘chiefs’: it is the fact that everything entailed in being part of society is *faa-matai*, ‘guided by the *matai* phenomenon’:³³ the representation of the sacred order of the ancestors’ names throughout the country — a fluctuating representation at this level, but very clear at the level of each district and each village taken in isolation.

Everyone thus has in mind the circle of the *matai* of his village, and determines his own position with respect to his peers as though the interaction were homologous to that of the *matai* names from which everyone descends.

We have already seen that the ‘*matai* name’ is the name of a memorable ancestor who has founded a family in the sense of having left the memory of a specific genealogy and a history of great and small events, often connected with wars, which is passed on. In Samoa, every person belongs to a ‘family’ (*aiga*) and often to several, and each *aiga* is something like a culture group, defined around the preservation of one or several ancestral names. There is therefore no such thing as a person who is not linked to at least one *matai* name, and when we see that reference to the place occupied by this name guides all personal interaction, it becomes clear that we are dealing with the most inclusive system of belonging.

The name of an ancestor becomes a *matai* name (*suafa o matai*), a title as the literature has grown accustomed to calling it, if this name has authority over a land: a land that has been connected with the name since time immemorial, or which was given to this ancestor by another *matai* who had authority over this land, often in token of a service rendered in time of war. Today as yesterday a *matai* can still create a *matai* name and give this new name a land over which his own name had authority. In this ideology, where the continuity between the gods, the ancestors and men is uninterrupted, men have always behaved towards each other as (they imagine) the gods behave towards them. The great *matai* names come down from the gods (they originate in the cosmogony), others can be traced back to another *matai* name (which originally created them).³⁴

The name has a founding house (*maota*), and this house becomes the home of the *matai* and those he wants to gather around himself once he has been invested by the extended family. The name must always be carried by someone in order to stay ‘alive’. The person invested with the name is therefore called the ‘*matai* of the family’ (*o le matai o le*

aiga). After a number of generations, the extended family (*aiga*) thus created is defined as follows: is considered to be a member any person, even living at the other end of the archipelago (people are scattered far and wide by marriage), who can (and wishes to) state any genealogical link (paternal, maternal or by adoption) with any of the *matai* who has succeeded to this name (and whose connection is known and accepted by the other members). He thereby becomes 'an heir to the name' (*suli*), he can take his place in the 'extended family circle' (*aiga potopoto*) which meets whenever there is a decision to be made concerning the whole family — and he can be a candidate to this name when the incumbent *matai* ceases to exercise his charge and a successor must be chosen.

Comment

Two distinctions need to be added:

1) The extended family circle which elects the new *matai* is divided into those who descend, through male or female links, from a son or a brother of the founding *matai* (or from the one who is the reference for the succession in question), who are called the 'male children' and who are eligible to succeed, and those who descend from a daughter or a sister of a *matai*, who are called the 'female children',³⁵ and who are supposed to 'know', by divine communication, who among the 'male children' will make a 'good' *matai*. This fundamental dichotomy no longer operates in a number of families, where all lines have become sources of potential candidates; this is the beginning of a deep-seated change which must be linked with the others which tend to diminish the operation and the efficacy of the social division of labour between 'brother' and 'sister' lines on behalf of an image of mankind closer to the Western conception, in which there are only men and women (see below). Among other things, this produces a feeling of equality between the lines descending from a woman and those descending from a man, hence the claim that each should 'have a turn' at choosing from their own line the person who will bear the title of *matai*.

2) For a candidate to be *eligible*, it must be possible to say: 'Look how well he has served (*tautua*) his family all these years!', which means that the person (man or woman) is not merely a genealogical heir, but that he or she has actually participated regularly in the life of the group and that they have demonstrated their 'generosity' (*alofa*), since 'service' consists chiefly in doing all one can to help collect and prepare the goods to be given in the exchanges between families (exchanges which are constantly cropping up and which make village life), but also to cook and do other jobs for the *matai* and his immediate family.

It should be noted that the charge of the *matai* can cease to be fulfilled; this can happen for three reasons: the death of the *matai*, an illness which renders him incapable of performing his duties — the *matai* then announces that he wants to hand on his title to another — finally a series of acts judged reprehensible by the family as a whole — the 'family circle' meets to decide to rescind the person's right to carry the name. For in Samoa, whatever is done by consensus can also be undone by it.

Consensus

This point must be stressed. The *matai* is always chosen by consensus, obtained if need be by exhausting those who were not initially agreed, after several days of meeting and discussion. Of course some voices carry more weight than others, but the person's rank simply makes his speech more persuasive. In the *aiga* family, there is no voting, no system which might give some the right to vote and not others, or which might make some votes count double, and so forth. And as long as any opposition is voiced, the discussion must go on, for any choice imposed by the majority would, people say, in the months or the years to come, only lead to dissention and even violence.

Of course any consensus is arrived at more or less by force. But those who are listening to the debate, on behalf of whom the discussion is held, and those who are even present in the persons speaking, are the ancestors, beginning with the founding ancestor whose name is the reason for the discussion. Therefore, it is what is said aloud, in public, that matters. Once all expressed arguments have been exhausted, the persistence of any unvoiced opposition is something else, which does not prevent everyone from drinking the ceremonial drink from the same bowl (*kava*, the drink of the gods and the ancestors). The union approved by the ancestors can no longer be undone. It is something like giving one's word, even reluctantly, in an honour system. It is not easy to go back on one's word and if one does, one immediately leaves the domain of discussion and crosses over to the side of violence. Decision by consensus is a very strong decision, for to subsequently go against it, one is compelled immediately to opt for violence (not to mention the dread of breaking an agreement witnessed by the ancestors: the person will fall sick before they have time to consider how to use violence). This is the ideology that presided and continues to preside at every Samoan discussion in a 'sacred circle', whether at the family or the village level; it is therefore fundamental. It is thus easy to conceive that the introduction of a system operating by majority vote would change many things.³⁶

'O le nuu': the village

This set of names connected with a founding land might merely constitute a group of families living side by side, an inert list of family names and lands. To this, however, must immediately be added the village dimension, at least in the sense of *nuu*. As we know, Samoa is a network of villages ('country': *atunuu*), and its custom is 'the essence of the *nuu*' (*aganuu*). This dimension is present from the outset because a land is always a 'village land'. It is located in the territory of the village, which means that certain decisions can have a considerable impact on the way this land is used. Even if the land holds a founding house — and in this event nothing and no one can annul it, it is an ancestral site and the ancestor is believed to be buried there — the village can expel the people who occupy it. The village cannot change the name which has title to the land, but it has every right over the individuals who live on a land belonging to the circle of village lands. These rights used to include the power to put someone to death or to banish them. Today they still include banishment, a sentence which can be pronounced against an individual, against a *matai*, or against several individuals, even a whole extended family, living on this family's village land. One can see the limits arising from this system. Not only is there no such thing as private

ownership of the land, but the village can sever the tie that links individuals to their ancestral right to use a land, with the typically Samoan distinction between, on the one hand, the principle of ancestry, which is off limits: this land remains X's land, and if those living there are banished, other members of the family, living in another village, can move onto it; and, on the other hand, the individual: this person is entirely subject to the consensual decisions of the group to which they belong, namely, first of all the extended family circle, which can expel one of its members, and then the village circle, which has authority over the families and the persons that comprise them.

How can a village decision be imposed on a family? Because every family is part of a circle of which it is only one component: the circle of the village families. Every family is a group that reproduces itself around the preservation of a name which must 'live' and therefore must be carried on. This name is connected with a land; both are basic components of the social circle formed by the village. The village *nuu* is nothing other than a circle of *aiga*, a circle of *matai* names (which range from ten to more than fifty) together with their associated lands. To say that the village can dictate the way a family uses its land is simply to say that a family always lives with other families, in a circle, and that, in the event of serious misconduct, the whole circle can decide to expel this family, which is only one component of the circle, just as the extended family 'meeting in a circle' (*aiga potopoto*) can decide to banish one of its members — in the same way as it must decide which of the individuals in this circle will be the family's next *matai*.

Every Samoan belongs to a sacred circle at every level. Outside the circle he ceases to exist. The individual does not exist if he has no 'family circle' (the literal translation of *aiga potopoto*) to belong to. The family (his place of origin) does not exist if it is not inscribed at the territorial level in a village circle (*nuu, nuu o matai*). If this kind of belonging is not in place, the individual cannot sit down in a house because every house represents a circle of belonging; in this event, he is without a house, which is inconceivable in the Samoan culture; he must be able to sit down, and know what post to lean against when his family meets, the two being synonymous: when a person 'belongs', he knows at what 'place' in the circle he belongs. The same is true at the village level: the *matai* of a family could not sit down with other *matai*, he would not know what post to sit against when the circle of the *matai* (*nuu o matai*) met to decide village affairs.

This strong sense of belonging, this security in one's identity comes at a cost, as the following anecdote shows. Curiously — something that might seem surprising in a Polynesian system — Samoan society has sometimes been judged by Europeans, determined at the start of the century to see the spirit of enterprise emerging and developing there, as conveying 'communist' values, a lamentation repeated in other terms by the more recent New Zealand administration and today by development experts sent to advise Samoa in exchange for international aid and loans.³⁷ It is true that the communist ideal and the sacred principle of so-called 'traditional' societies share the fact that they leave no room for purely individual decisions, *at least at this level*; a person is first a member of a group, which, in the Samoan culture, is represented by the shape and the idea of a 'circle'.

Comment

The phrase 'at this level' is not a matter of pure form: the personal decision against the group or with no reference to the group, is not something taken within the circle of identity: it is not taken *at this level* — but it does indeed exist. A very large portion of the things that affect the life of every Samoan originate outside the sacred circles of belonging. Nevertheless, our concern for method compels us to work outwards from the circle and not the inverse. The observer can perceive these things happening outside the circles on condition that he regard them, methodologically speaking, as 'level-2' phenomena, which should be understood by opposition to the phenomena of 'level 1' (the relations of belonging; see below, the section on change). For what makes these phenomena 'Samoan' for us is not, or not only, their apparently universalistic content ('the individual'), but the fact that they are experienced by Samoans as things that do not belong to any of their 'circles'. Once we step into the circle (as observers), what we see going on outside it becomes culturally specific, instead of being immediately bound up in the projections of our own categories ('the individual as opposed to society'). We will mention some of these facts when we discuss change, because this 'level 2' is the level that is spontaneously open to the introduction of new elements. Here we find political strategy, the competitive relationship to objects, private ownership, sporting activity (but not the results of this activity) or, in former times, warfare (but likewise not the outcome of war); for during the time of the 'action' *fai* (sport, war, work, travel), a circle of identity must ensure the *tapuai*, 'communication with the divine realm', and it is only the encompassing of the former by the latter which produces a tangible result; in Samoa, people say that the outcome of a sporting event is the fruit of the spectators' *tapuai* (their union — *feagaiga* — with God) and not the result of the players' action, or rather it is the result of their action insofar as the action is itself the product of the spectators' *tapuai*.³⁸

In Samoa, one is thus a member of a circle: the assembled family (*aiga potopoto*), one of the *nuu* of the village, and on a more conceptual level, the circle of villages, the one that makes up the district or the one that makes up the whole archipelago. A family name is always part of a system of names, which is, in its broad rules, in the way it defines for all Samoans the quality of being a Samoan person, the *faamatai*. But the system can best be seen at work in the village community, and Samoa is thus primarily a set of several hundreds of circles of names. In each village, the circle of these names is called the *nuu o matai*, the *nuu* of the *matai*. It is manifested in the regular meetings of the village *matai* (*fono o matai*, or simply *fono*). They meet in one of the village founding houses; in some cases it is always the same house, that of the name of the village's greatest and most ancient *matai*, and in some cases they meet in a different house each time, to honour several *matai* names. All of these houses are, physically, a circle of posts holding up a huge, more-or-less conical roof. The *matai* sit on the floor (a stone pavement covered with a layer of coral and then a layer of mats), cross-legged and leaning against a post. No post is the same as any other, and the seating order around the circle of posts is an instantaneous representation of the hierarchy of names. This hierarchy is historico-legendary and is inscribed in a series of statements which relate the origin of the village and the hierarchy of its *matai* names.

Even today these phrases are used in greeting whenever one *matai* meets another. *Matai* greet each other through the intermediary of their ancestors, as it were, as though each actually was the founding ancestor of the *matai* name he bears, and had just relived a condensed version of this ancestor's history.³⁹ But that is what each *matai* is: not only does he bear the ancestor's name, he 'is' this ancestor, from the day he is invested with the name until the day he dies or the family decides to take it away from him.⁴⁰ This is visible, for example, in the way children, even very little ones, address their father — which surprises the visitor. Even the day before his selection, they called him 'Pita' (from Peter) or 'Siva' (from a compound name beginning with the word for 'dance', *siva*) and so forth, using 'his birth name' (the equivalent of our first name). They would use this name in all situations where a European child would say 'Daddy'; in Samoa, kin terms of address do not exist; only the proper names are used. In short, the day before, they called him 'Pita'. This morning, the bestowal ceremony took place and, of course, the children had known for quite some time that their father was going to receive the title '*Fonomalii*' (for example) and become the *matai* of the family. That very evening, without a hint of hesitation in their voice, they are calling their father by his new name: 'Fono!' (the *matai* name was *Fonomalii*, but all names, ordinary ones or *matai* names, are shortened in address; the first part is kept or, more rarely, the last).

Beyond the village, there is no social identity which operates on a continuous basis.⁴¹ The hierarchy of *matai* names, however, is used country-wide in the following manner. First of all, as we have seen, when *matai* from different villages meet, they exchange greetings using formulas which sum up the genealogical history of their villages (these are condensations, but it can still take several minutes to utter them because they are made up of several statements which describe the principal names of the sacred circle and their history). However each one recites the history of the other: 'Welcome to you who... (comes from village X)', 'Thanks to you who... (comes from village Y)'. In other words, a good *matai* knows the basic history of the names of between a hundred and three hundred villages and, even if two *matai* are meeting for the first time, once they have exchanged names, each usually knows what village the other comes from and the rank his name holds within his village. The exchange of the formulas which summarise the village's history merely confirms this knowledge and creates a more intimate relationship, after which conversation can commence.

To sum up: a *matai* is at home anywhere in Samoa. In a less ceremonial manner and with reduced verbal exchange, the same holds for anyone, once they have told each other what village and family (and therefore what *matai* name) they come from. The fact that a *matai* is at home in any village, in short, that the hierarchy of the *matai* system is universal for a Samoan, is further shown by the following rule: when a family holds a bestowal ceremony for a *matai*, if the village concerned is of course participating (the new *matai* is in the circle of names which makes up this village and to which the name being bestowed belongs), any *matai* passing through can also join in the ceremony and the accompanying exchanges. Once he has entered the house, he will expect to receive little or much, in accordance with the greatness of his name.

Comment

A 'great' name is, in sum, an ancient name, which thus appears in numerous genealogical histories of various names in the country, and therefore one which many people know. Being an ancient name, it is at the centre of a far-flung kinship network. The older the name, the more lines are connected with one or another of the *matai* who has carried this name and who is remembered; this makes it possible to gather more things for exchanges and thus to affirm, confirm or even enhance the rank of this name. In the long run, these fluctuations can affect the hierarchical position within the village, and the *matai* will claim a different post to lean against the next time the village *matai* circle meets.⁴²

The *faamatai* is thus at the same time a hierarchy that can be observed daily in the village and an ideology of belonging to a system which for everyone defines 'Samoa'. To be 'Samoan' is always to be able, through the agency of the *matai* name one carries or to which one is linked, to establish a status orientation ('respect' — *faaalalo*) in relation to anyone one encounters anywhere in the country.

Let us now go back to the beginning and finish this point. Each person has a place in relation with that of the *matai* name to which he or she is linked. A village *nuu* is first of all, as we have seen, the circle of *matai* — which is the circle of *matai* names, the circle of the deceased ancestors, the latter personified by the *matai* (in the sense, this time, of the person bearing the name). This is the village council, which decides everything, by consensus. But the *nuu* is also the *nuu* of the 'daughters of *matai*', that is to say, all of the women related by blood to the *matai* names of the village. They have their own meetings, their own ceremonies, and their internal hierarchy is modelled on that of the *matai* names. The same holds to a certain extent for the third *nuu*, that of the 'sons of *matai*', which is comprised of the men in the village who are not *matai* at the time in question. Last of all, it is true, but with even greater nuances, of the 'wives of *matai*', whose group is structured by the hierarchy of their husband's *matai* names.⁴³ It should be added that a woman's membership in the *matai* system is always governed more by her blood ties than by marriage. These wives, who do not really belong to their husband's *nuu*, are, in their home village, full members of the *nuu* of the 'daughters of *matai*' of their respective villages, and they reactualise this membership if they divorce or are widowed, and even each time they return to their village alone, which they do frequently. Distances are never very great, and Samoans have a notable habit of visiting and travelling, by virtue of their tradition of *malaga*. Today the word has come to designate any 'journey', even personal trips, but until the 1940s, it meant that a whole village went to pay a visit to another, with ceremonies and competitive dancing, singing and wrestling, which went on for several days (during which time marriage plans were also drawn up). Old people say that these *malaga* were a frequent occurrence. It was the principal opportunity to celebrate and to 'get away'. In Samoa, 'home' is the village, which is an exogamous unit, even though not everyone is necessarily related. The importance of the *malaga* tradition can be ascribed to the fact that marriages are contracted between villages.⁴⁴

Because of this, every man and woman, *matai* or not, carries around a mental image of the hierarchy of *matai* names which constitutes his or her ideological reference in relations with others. That is the *matai* system; it is at the heart of the *faaSamoa* which identifies the Samoan

culture area, and that is why it organises the Samoan identity into a series of connected and concentric circles: those of the families and those of the village, and less frequently, those of the districts and those of each island: finally, and on a more imaginary plane, those of each of the two Samoas, and even of the entire Samoan culture area, a circle which would exist if all the *matai* of the two Samoas, western and eastern, were to assemble and meet together.

Change

‘Tradition/modernity’

By following our initial choice of method, which attempted to discover the system of belonging, we have caught a glimpse, however brief, of the values behind the Samoan identity: the *matai* system (*faamatai*), system of ancestral names which have become ranked titles; the *faaSamoa*, ‘the way of life and speech proper to Samoa’ and claimed as such by Samoans; the *atunuu* (‘country’) and the *aganuu* (‘custom’), in the sense of the deeply ingrained nature of the village group hierarchically organised in a circle, by order of rank of the ancestral names. These values give a densely textured picture of Samoan identity as it can be observed today, as Samoans themselves see it and live it in practice.

It would be tempting to end our portrait of identity here. Though it is clear that each of the foregoing paragraphs, each of the sentences, even, calls for a detailed development, even restricting ourselves to a list of features, as we have done, we can say that the picture is relatively complete. The representation of ‘us’ held by each Samoan is the complex of memberships in the *aiga* family and the village *nuu*, conveyed through the system of ancestral *matai* names connected with a land.

Must the sociocultural changes now be weighed, so to speak, in terms of the degree of resistance offered by the various elements glimpsed up to this point? This is the usual naive ‘tradition vs. modernity’ approach. It is true that the constituent elements of identity which can be seen today are also found in older people’s evocations of the 1920s to 1940s, and even in the nineteenth-century accounts written by the missionaries and administrators of the time.⁴⁵ One therefore gets the impression that little changed over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. More accurately, one could think that nothing is known about pre-Christian Samoa (before 1830), but that historically documented Samoa and present-day Samoa are astonishingly close to us; thus, everything relating to Christianity — such as it has become in Samoa — is claimed by today’s Samoans as their tradition, as their ‘custom’ (*aganuu*) ever since ‘the darkness gave way to the light’. And one would award them ‘first prize overall’ for conservatism and resistance to Western acculturation, at any rate since the 1830s.

Indeed, in the explicit Samoan discourse, the relationship between ‘tradition’ (the *faaSamoa*) and ‘modernity’ (the *faaPapalagi*, the ‘Papalagi or European way’) is clearly weighted in favour of the former. This pair of terms comes to mean the custom of a specific society, ‘Samoa’ versus the Europeans’ custom — it is no longer a society — as it is perceived by Samoans in its global dimension: currency, the market, individualism, etc.

It should be noted in passing that, unlike other South Pacific peoples, in Papua New Guinea for instance, whose vision of inherent European otherness would include, alongside Christianity, human rights and democracy,⁴⁶ Samoans see each of these latter values as an

area of their own identity, moreover an area in which they feel themselves to be closer to the truth than today's Europeans (whom they see in Samoa and especially whom they observed in New Zealand or Australia when working as immigrant labourers). They go to church regularly and see that Europeans do not. They point out that, in their *matai* system, all 'men' have equal 'dignity' — *mamalu* (however, they say it is the *matai* names who enjoy the dignity, not the living) — whereas Europeans let their own people starve in the streets — something that never happens in Samoa and is even unthinkable; on this subject, people explain to foreign visitors that, in Samoa, 'you only have to know two words: *faamolemole* ('please') and *faafetai* ('thank you'), to always find a house to stay in and a meal to share'. These words belong to the vocabulary of relation, 'respect' (*faaloalo*), and make it possible to locate a hierarchical relationship on the circumference of a circle, in sum to integrate the asker; whereas, as emigrant Samoans have remarked, the same words used by Europeans by no means prevent, in certain cases, the person being left on his own, the relationship being limited to acts of (Christian or public) 'charity'. Finally, some Samoans consider that European-style democracy (*faaPapalagi*, expressed in Samoan by the English word 'democracy'), that is majority rule, is a source of inequality and conflict compared with Samoan-style democracy (which they call *temokalasi*, the Samoan phonetic transcription of the English word), which appeals to 'consensus' in the sense already discussed.

To say of someone's action or personality that they are *faaPapalagi* ('European-like'), or worse yet, *fiaPapalagi* ('deliberately wanting to mimic the Europeans') was and still is a grave insult, a cause for resentment and conflict. To tell someone that he has forgotten the *faaSamoa*, the rules of custom, is just as serious. Banishment, and therefore temporary loss of membership in one's village and *nuu* group, still constitutes very harsh punishment, owing to the ensuing shame, even if it is only a social death (and localised, since a person immediately finds other relatives in another *nuu* to take him/her in). It is therefore almost impossible to find someone who acts with total disregard for the constraints of the *faamatai*.

Yet everyone would have only to cancel their contributions to the family exchanges, and of course a certain new population, chiefly young wage-earners from town, is sometimes tempted to do just this. Some are duplicitous, attempting to conceal a (small) portion of their salary from their parents, but no one ever goes the whole way. In reality, no one could, unless they were to emigrate to another country, and even then, they would have to shun the Samoan community. The only persons or families who manage capitalist-style accumulation to any extent, instead of putting everything into the exchanges, are the 'half' families (*afakasi*) in and around the town (a small fraction of the population). And even here, while they manage it on the European or Chinese side of their tradition (a male ancestor who was among the traders who arrived in the nineteenth century), it is possible because, at the same time, this monetary policy gives them liquid cash and enables them to distinguish themselves, sporadically but spectacularly, by massive contributions to the exchanges. No 'half' merchant family in Samoa is totally cut off from the *faamatai* — they would go broke within a month. Moreover, the European or Chinese ancestor or his children have often become *matai* by receiving a *matai* name from the family of their wife or their mother.

Much could be said about the use of the *faamatai* today in the new contexts of politics or business. But the details simply re-confirm the permanence and the importance of the

components of Samoan identity discussed above. Far from eliminating these elements, the new contexts provide fresh fields for their exercise.

Here we touch on yet another dimension. These new contexts arose precisely because their appearance did not imply a flagrant contradiction with the *faamatai* and did not threaten to suppress it — below, in the section on religion, we will see this major particularity of Samoan history. But once they have arisen, they create new elements of identity which mingle with those already present, and the latter are induced to change — imperceptibly at first, but in a way that may have an impact later on. And we move towards a fundamental transformation if these changes, situated from the outset at the first level of the configuration or working their way up to that level through the dynamics of change, thereby induce an insuperable contradiction. This is what we will look at now.

At the same time, we will continue to examine Samoan identity by observing the secondary levels open to change. Describing the secondary levels of the socio-cultural configuration (what I will call ‘level 2’) means pursuing our study of identity. Of course the observer will notice a host of things in addition to those which constitute the system of belonging (‘level 1’). And it is important not to neglect this area, for it is precisely here that change is constantly making inroads. Any attempt to talk about this level immediately demands a definition of the period of identity and the sequence of these periods. Here identity and change are closely intertwined.

Why does change creep in here? For these are levels which elude, if not the awareness of the interested parties, at least the main focus of their attention in terms of causal explanations. At this level not everything needs to be explained or connected to everything else. One no longer has the feeling that a change in one element will trigger the modification of all the others; for here things are no longer part of a sacred circle, they are much less interdependent. And because these levels are no longer defined by the key-value of belonging and are no longer organised by the logic of the circle, they may have no conceptualisation in the local language.

Furthermore, we are talking about phenomena which the observer perceives even if the informants’ explicit discourse makes no mention of them. As a consequence, identification of these areas partially reflects the observer’s own cultural and professional preoccupations. It depends to a large extent on the latter’s standpoint, and, for instance, there is no way to be sure that the inventory of these areas is exhaustive. It also depends on the observer’s sensitivity to the indications of belonging under study and which will have been identified as the first level of the configuration. For it is especially there, where the observed phenomena subsequently appear to contradict the level-1 data, that he will stop, even involuntarily, and try to understand these paradoxes.

This itinerary is part of the method imposed by the comparative approach.⁴⁷ In order to avoid identifying by pure (‘ethnocentric’) projection the contexts in which we think we recognise familiar phenomena, we must set them against the backdrop of the system of belonging in which we initially sought the specificity of the society. This preliminary research — translating the system of belonging — is particular, and the method rests on a very precise dictionary: the logic of the possibilities of the hierarchy, that is to say the logic of whole/part relations which alone enable us to model a system of belonging. But the only

direct basis for the translation of the other contexts is our projections: here or there we see ‘power’, the ‘economy’, ‘conflict’, ‘domination’, and so forth. How can we express the ‘Samoan-ness’ of these phenomena? What makes them ‘Samoan’ in our eyes? How can we say something more or else than our already well-established definitions of these domains? By finding a contrast, by observing how, for Samoans, these are things experienced outside their circles of identity. The example of violence springs to mind. If we address the subject directly, all we obtain are trivialities about ‘human nature’. If we observe how the fact of standing outside the circle allows a process of violence to be set in motion, we have taken a step towards translating the specificity of the Samoan culture. We will return to this subject when we come to the sphere of politics.

I personally have observed the following sets of contradictory phenomena:

- a highly individualistic and violent relationship with a portion of the invisible beings people believe in, namely *aitu* spirits; whereas relations with the divine are governed entirely by the *faamatai* system, and direct relations between the individual and God, as in Western Christianity, do not exist;
- a highly egocentric and/or competitive attitude in certain relationships which appeared to me to come under the *faamatai*; also the observation of this attitude, rapidly giving way to violence, in the relation to certain objects and to the fraught idea of possession; whereas the first observations tend to dwell on the constantly stressed values of staying ‘in one’s place’ in the hierarchy, and on the values of sharing and collective ownership only, ownership by the *aiga* family as such and therefore under the management of the *matai* (what an early twentieth-century German administrator called communism ‘Samoan style’)⁴⁸;
- the constitution and evolution, within the notion of political representation by consensus, of an area of electoral strategy which recently gave rise to a huge debate in Samoa about the relationship between politics and the values of the *faamatai*, when certain government measures pointed out a number of contradictions at level 1.

These categories are clearly predictable, for all I did was to be sensitive to the major domains that my own culture taught me to identify: religion, economics, politics. The difference with the usual method is that, having made an effort to avoid these divisions in the first part of the study, I then used them to deduce these categories from my initial observations, which dealt with precisely that which appears to be indivisible because it is a ‘total’ social fact, in this case the *faamatai* with all it entails. This gives us the means to measure, as it were, the intensity of past or ongoing change by measuring the degree of contradiction that is beginning to build up in the way the new phenomenon was or is being integrated at level 2, and especially in the way it then does or does not work its way, with or without contradiction, up to level 1.⁴⁹

The faamatai and religion

The realm of the divine and the spirits

Samoans’ attitude towards the *aitu* — we will call them ‘spirits’ — claims our attention: it is a combative relationship. People are wary of them, for they are like thieves or assassins,

concealed, ready to strike from behind, to steal a soul, to silently attack a night-time walker, to don the appearance of a relative or a friend and to lead to his or her death whoever is unfortunate enough to let themselves be deceived. Spirits are the chief cause of illness. Everyone believes in spirits, even pastors (all church personnel has been Samoan for a century). When anger and sorrow overwhelm somebody weeping over their sick child, people go for their machetes and, standing there in the dark, call on the spirits to come and fight. Spirits are connected with a place, especially the spirits of the dead, those of the legendary as well as the recent past. For the most part, a spirit is a 'night-time' being, on the side of death, the forest and the open sea. Anything that is 'dark' and 'hidden' can harbour a spirit.

Alternatively, the relationship with God (O Le Atua: 'the God') is like the relationship with the family *matai*: communion around the circle (*faatasi*: 'together') and 'respect' (*faaaloalo*). God is the source of society, of the whole *nuu* organisation, of the *faamatai*. People address him as a group: the evening family prayer, the Sunday village prayer. People take their place with respect to others, in the house or in the church, according to their rank in the *faamatai*. They make offerings (in church) which are announced publicly at the end of the service and which, like the distribution of the kava, provide an image of the family rankings in the village at that moment: a person who is 'great' is supposed to give more, and if he cannot ... it is because he is no longer as great as he was thought to be. God is 'light', on the side of 'day' and life, on the side of the village. People pray to God at home and in church, just as they prayed to the old god inside the house and on the central village ground. Every house is a potential temple, as is the entire village.

If we consider the literature on Oceania and its linguistic history, nowhere do we find such a strong, clear-cut dichotomy as here. The *aitu* and the *atua* are mixed together in the missionary accounts;⁵⁰ and according to one comparative study, the most that can be said is that within the cosmological space, the *atua* are placed further away or higher than the *aitu*.⁵¹ What happened? First of all, it is clear that the new god has taken the place of the old one: the entire system of prayer and relation with the *faamatai* remains unchanged. And secondly, the relationship between light and darkness (the conditions of prayer, the fire offering, etc.) is still the central dogma.⁵²

Nevertheless, one important change has entered the picture. This relationship is also used to represent a new temporal dichotomy: the Christian era is the time of 'light', the Samoans say; that is why, they add, the preceding era was the time of 'darkness'. Formerly 'night', today 'light'. Therefore, as they say as well, formerly there were only spirits. The study shows that everyone knows numerous stories from their grandparents about how their own grandparents, etc. had dealings with one spirit or another; in a word, belief in spirits has by no means disappeared, even if, without our being able to ascertain the exact extent, it is clear that some modalities of this belief have changed. Alternatively, the vast majority of Samoans are unable even to name the figures of the pre-Christian pantheon, although it reigned until the middle of the nineteenth century, including the name Tagaloa.⁵³ Today, in the time of light, spirits are defined as being antinomic to the time and the light of day, and they come out almost exclusively at night (when they can unleash their fury). The representation of the past, bolstered by this new dichotomy God/spirits, therefore supports

the idea that formerly there was no 'God', only 'spirits'. The ultimate consequence of this reformulation of the past being: men themselves used to be 'half-man, half-spirit'.⁵⁴

We may, without undue risk, judge that, as everywhere else in Polynesia, the old system was quite the reverse: a seamless hierarchy running from the principal creator god(s), their multiple forms which appeared at various times and places, to local spirits, wandering souls, humans created by the gods, humans born from the union of a mortal and a god, and finally, to ordinary humans. Myth told that nothingness (*Leai*) had preceded the Sky (*Lagi*) and that Night (*Po*) had come before the Light-of-Day (*Ao*), and everyone drew their conclusions: life — therefore society — consequently required constant ritual work so that Day might keep Night at bay while wresting away a portion of the sacred so that life might be reproduced (encompassment): cooking, tattooing, marriage, bestowal of a *matai* name, etc. all cooperated in transforming the raw into the cooked, darkness into light, the sacred powers of death into powers of life. Today this universe has become much more static: during the day we are with God, and this relationship is conducted through speech; at night we must fear the spirits. God is pure goodness, the spirits are incapable of anything but evil, and are basically stand-ins for the Devil (*Tevolo*).⁵⁵

The boundaries of change

Has this change led to a fundamental transformation? It seems not. The appearance of a dichotomic and static perspective on history has not altered the social system of belonging. Partaking of 'daytime' (physically or symbolically), the relationship with God is as it ever was and transits through the *faamatai*, encompassing as it were, the personal, combative relationship with the spirits: in the 'daytime' it is not mentioned. When a spirit takes action (illness, etc.), means exist today as they did yesterday to root out the evil with the help of healers and to reinstate the supremacy of light. In daily life as in ceremonial practice, the relationship between God and the spirits, in other words, the relationship between life and death, is as it has always been: the social labour of the *faamatai* guarantees the first and consequently maintains the second at a lower level, where evil prevails only at times and in spaces bounded by the first domain⁵⁶

To be sure, the sources of life are now seen as being located directly on the side of 'light' (God), whereas formerly, they were transferred (and transformed) by working on the sacred domain of 'night'. That is why, for instance, God is today considered to be the source, the foundation and the supreme head of the whole *faamatai*, and the investiture of the *matai* has more to do with all that than with tattooing (formerly an essential feature, as an operation which imprinted on the body the 'blackness' of the sacred powers of 'night' — whereas today tattooing has become a simple distinctive sign of rank: a *matai* 'should be tattooed', but no one knows why, or explanations are sought in the area of outstanding physical feats, in this case the endurance required to withstand this long, painful operation). But the result is basically the same when it comes to the *matai's* authority and his role as representative of the family group.⁵⁷

The real boundary between contemporary Samoa and a fundamental transformation is that of the point in time when the relationship with God would no longer be mediated by the *faamatai* but would become a wholly individual matter, either due to a change in the

religious system or to the disappearance, for other reasons, of the *faamatai* itself. There is no sign of this, however; God was even placed in the preamble to the Constitution drawn up at the time of independence, in 1962,⁵⁸ and he likewise features in the national motto: ‘Samoa’ the *atunuu*, and therefore the *nuu* therefore the *faamatai*, ‘is founded upon God’ (*Faavai i le Atua Samoa*).

But the horizon is not unclouded for all that. It is clear that the *faamatai* and the main Church have to a certain extent drifted under the influence of the London Missionary Society: bureaucratisation, monopolisation, social stratification are present in part of the system — or at least if the complaints voiced by certain village pastors are to be believed. It is therefore not surprising that a good number of Samoans lend a willing ear to the discourse of the new Churches, arriving from the United States in particular, which denounce the hypocrisy of the mainstream Churches’ administrative machinery, urging a cleansing of the institution as well as of the soul. The problem is that these new Churches have relatively little connection with the *faamatai* and consequently encourage an individual relationship between God and the believer’s soul. Today [early 1990s], in some families, even those of ‘great’ *matai*, the parents may go to the traditional church, while some of their children (in the 25-year-old bracket) reject this practice and join, sometimes even militate in, Youth for Christ and other similar groups.

To be sure, the plurality of denominations is not new in Samoa, since from the start there were the Protestants from the London Missionary Society, the Methodists and the Catholics, who were rapidly joined by the Mormons and, in lesser numbers, the Seventh-Day Adventists.⁵⁹ The strategic use of this multiplicity within the family and the village is well known. Each time a family quarrel of any importance breaks out, one fraction may decide to change Churches: one way of saying, of course we are still part of the family, but we are pulling back on a secondary level. A decision of this kind does not throw the family and the village system into question because it takes place on the level of competition and strategies; just as, at the village level this time, Samoa is known throughout the South Pacific for the rivalry between neighbouring villages to have the biggest and newest church building. All of which means that this country of 160,000 inhabitants is divided into over 300 villages and prays in more than 1,000 churches. But this multiplicity adds nothing that might contradict the first level, that on which God is the foundation of the *faamatai*, and therefore the foundation of the village and the family. Alternatively, an individual relationship with religion which would short-circuit the *faamatai* would rapidly lead to a fundamental transformation. No such upheaval is visible for the moment, but the question should be posed nevertheless, in view of the movement to join the new Churches.

Let us now look at the other aspect of change: the fact that the new God has supplanted the old one has visibly not created a fundamental transformation, since the *faamatai* remains in place — there seem to be no profound differences between the present situation (familiar to those of fifty and over) and that described by the first travellers and missionaries (but their accounts are too superficial for us to say absolutely). How are we to understand this? By looking at the issue of prohibitions and then at the figure of the pastor.

Continuity of prohibitions

The missionaries were of course eager to stamp out the worship of Tagaloa and the village gods. But there was not much of a battle⁶⁰ since the main taboos lay elsewhere, in the *faamatai* underpinning the ranking system, and these were not abolished. The family temples were the founding-houses of the *matai* names, in which, morning and evening, the *matai* called together the family circle and prayed to the deity.⁶¹ These houses are still standing, since they are simply family dwellings (at least in the case of the 'great house' surrounded by other smaller houses, which is used by the *matai* and/or his guests). People continued to call upon God and, moreover, kept the same name for him: *O le Atua*, since the missionaries had taken over the term to designate the God of the Bible. People continued to ask this god for the good things men have always asked of the gods. What was added was Bible reading, but since the Bible spoke for the most part about *alofa* (according to the translation of the Biblical 'love') the values of the *faamatai* were maintained (see below on *alofa*). The village temples, on the other hand, were *malae* (cf. the Tahitian *marae*), not like those in Tahiti or Hawaii, which were a stone-paved platform with posts and standing stones representing the gods, but simply a ground (ideally circular) at the centre of the village: a space watched over by the deity (it is the Samoans who say this), whose votive posts are the founding houses which encircle it and whose references are the village ancestors, with their names forever enthroned in the ceremonial definition of the village recited each time two *matai* from different villages meet. Thus the taboos were not abolished, nor was the *faamatai* undermined in any fundamental way.

One fact clearly played a crucial role: the missionaries were so bent on succeeding that they went to the trouble of learning the language and translating the Bible (all in 10 years).⁶² The two key-words of the relationship with the deity (*atua*, 'god' and *alofa*, the 'sympathetic' relationship between the gods and men, between the ancestors transformed into *matai* names and men, between a *matai* and the people of his family, between an elder and a younger member of the family, etc.) were thus unchanged. As the way these concepts were invoked was itself not changed in any fundamental way (so clearly was it linked to the *faamatai*, which was not abolished), no fundamental ideological transformation ultimately occurred.

The temples remained standing because they were houses, the old concepts were left intact. But what about the objects? It seems there were very few cult objects; thus here too there was no reason to throw a quantity of material symbols onto the fire. But above all, the chief symbol of the Samoan cult was the genealogy inscribed in memory, which links the living and the hereafter. A genealogy is not an object that can be seized and thrown into the fire. It is highly significant that it was — and still is — surrounded by very strong taboos, as are all cult objects, except that Samoan taboos apply to the way and the circumstances in which a genealogy is to be recited aloud, in front of others. It is highly significant, too, that, when the Samoans learned to write and when many *matai* felt the need to set down part of the family history in notebooks, a series of unverifiable rumours sprang up concerning unexplained losses, forgotten hiding places and purported thefts of these notebooks, as is the case elsewhere, in Africa for example, of fetishes or the regalia of sacred chiefs. Today as yesterday, these rumours are still making the rounds of the villages.

Pastor, sisters and wives: from integration to fundamental transformation

The pastor 'as a sister'

The new god obviously did not come alone. There were his messengers, in this case the Protestant pastors from the London Missionary Society, who made their way from eastern Polynesia (Tahiti) westwards, arriving in Samoa in 1830. In a certain fashion, it was with the pastor as with his God: he was immediately promoted to level 1, just as Jehova took the place of Tagaloa. But he could not pre-empt the spot previously occupied by the traditional priest. The traditional priest was the *matai* himself. It was he who led the family in prayer and who made the offerings. This can still be seen today: the *matai* indicates the order of prayer, distributes the roles (the words of forgiveness, thanks, petition), chooses the hymns. Knowing the Bible is just as necessary for a *matai* as knowing the ceremonial formulas for the main Samoan villages and the genealogies. In other words, the contradiction was present from the outset. Either the new personnel replaced the old and brought down the *faamatai*, for the pastors were not 'heirs' (*suli*) to the *matai* names, and the society changed completely. But the missionaries lacked the means: they were only a few individuals as against 30,000 inhabitants, all supporters of the *faamatai*.⁶³ Or the pastor took up a position that was already defined in the system but not one corresponding to the function of priest: one in which his presence did not eliminate the role of the *matai*. The insertion which turned out no doubt to be the least contradictory was to identify with the *matai*'s 'sister'. The sister (the person and/or a representative who may be male, of the line descended from the sister or the daughter of the first ancestor) is also believed to be in spiritual relation with the deity and with the ancestors of the *aiga* family, in this way playing a role in the choice of the successor to the title of *matai*; sometimes 'she' even plays a priestly role, as at the *matai*'s funeral. According to the legend known by everybody or almost in Samoa, the *matai* who dominated the politics of the district where the missionary boat landed, and who was busy waging a war, adopted this new god (the legend also says he had had a vision prophesying a new god who would bring him victory — which came true) and declared to the missionaries that henceforth they would be 'as' a sister [line] (*faafeagaiga*) with respect to his *matai* name, and therefore with regard to his people (family, village and district).⁶⁴

Since the new god was adopted, and the *matai*'s supremacy in war and politics obviously contributed to the spread of this new religion throughout the district, the only way this new element could relate to the *faamatai* was by integration (otherwise they would have been in total contradiction from the start and have prompted a struggle between the Mission and the *faamatai*). The pastor, too, was therefore integrated and became 'as a sister' (to the village). This expression became his official title, the honorary term of address: *O le Faafeagaiga*.

But the parallel goes further. Just as the new god did not come alone but with the antithetical pairs: 'god/devil, good/evil', and just as he introduced into the heart of the representations of historical time a moral dichotomy between good and evil, between god and the spirits-and-the-devil, the pastor too was not alone — he was married — and the pastoral couple introduced into the heart of the representations of the village *nuu* the idea of

a social dichotomy between the sexes. Paradoxically, the consequences of this implant were more serious in the long run than the diachronic projection of the Night/Day opposition — these have been neglected in the analyses of the history and anthropology of contact in Samoa. For the moment, these consequences still affect only the second level, but contradiction with the first level is nearing breaking point. Let us take a closer look.

The pastor and the married couple

The typical Protestant church staff is a couple: the pastor and his wife. The ideology the couple would try to establish in the village was that of a world organised by complementarity between ‘men’s and women’s tasks’. Furthermore Protestants as well as Catholics developed the new idea of the sanctity of the marriage bond.

Here, too, a serious historical study remains to be done, but the broad lines are already apparent. We can see from Missionary reports how the pastor’s wife took over the education of the village women in matters of homemaking, housekeeping, health, dress (they imposed long, high-necked dresses), thus creating the idea and the phenomenon of a unified group of ‘women’ that had not previously existed as such. This affirmation is supported by the conflicts which can still be observed, and those recounted time and again by older people, between the organisation of the village into *nuu* groups (the *matai*, their daughters, their sons and, separately, their wives) and an organisation into male and female halves. These halves were activated through para-religious groups (choirs, Christian youth groups) and, especially, by the development in each village, with the arrival of administrators from New Zealand, of ‘women’s committees’ for health care (since 1918) whose attributions and will to control more and more affairs grew apace (personal notes). This development, encouraged by the medical sector, was possible only because the ideology of a male/female dichotomy had already been instilled and because the Mission had already established a division of labour along these lines.⁶⁵ One has only to read the memoirs of one of the very first missionaries, George Turner, who arrived around 1840:⁶⁶

I was appointed to a district on the south side of Upolu... I took up my abode in the centre of the district. Daily attendance at the children’s school, a class in the afternoon for the young men... a weekly lecture in some part of the district; a day spent entirely with my teachers and preachers; a prayer-meeting on Saturday afternoon; preaching three times, visiting the Sabbath-school... a meeting of the church members for prayer and exhortation once a month; the administration of the Lord’s Supper on the first Sabbath of the month; and a monthly missionary prayer-meeting; — these were among my principal duties during my first year of missionary life in Samoa. Mrs Turner had a meeting once a week with the women of the district, took a class at the Sunday-school, and had also a daily class of girls.⁶⁷

In view of the immensity of the task that lay before them, Turner and the other missionaries saw the urgency of having local teachers, and in 1844 they created the Samoan Missionary Seminary in Malua, which quickly gained fame throughout the South Pacific. It graduated — and continues to graduate — all the Samoan missionaries who set out to evangelise other

countries and all the pastors working in Samoa. Today, when a boy graduates from high-school with a high grade-point average, he asks himself whether he should apply to the State college or go to Malua (which has a four-year program) to become a pastor. Both paths are regarded as prestigious (and promise a lucrative occupation in the end). From its beginnings, the seminary made marriage an important factor in the selection of candidates. Let us listen again to Turner:

Marriage prevents admission to many of our home colleges; it is not so at our Samoan Mission Seminary. If we have the choice of two we reject the single man, and admit the married couple, for the simple reason that the wife needs education as well as her husband, and, when instructed, is a great blessing to her sex in the village where he may be called to labour. 'We want a young man who has a wife that can teach our wives and daughters something', is sometimes the adjunct to an application for a village pastor.⁶⁸

Life at Malua was modelled on village life (the students had a garden and grew what they needed to feed themselves), with the addition of course of classes and prayers:

Wednesday is what we call our industrial day, and until two o'clock, is specially devoted to improvements about the premises ... while the young men are at work in the early part of the day, I have embraced the opportunity of having a class with their wives. The main instruction of them, of course, devolves on the ladies.⁶⁹

What was the consequence of the creation of a 'women's unit'? This was something new: either it was created from nothing, or, which comes down to the same thing, it consisted in moving a conception up to the first ideological level which had until then belonged to level 2.⁷⁰ From the outset, the result was a vague double system within the village organisation. For some decisions, the *nuu* groups can still be seen operating, and the 'village daughters' still enjoy their full sacred authority owing to the fact that they are both the 'treasure' and the spiritual link of the *matai* name with the deity and the origin of things. The wives do not participate, but each of them possesses this same authority in her own village when she goes home.⁷¹ For other matters, there is a tendency for the 'women's committee', whether it is a formal body or not, to decide: in this case, it is primarily a question of age, and an older woman (even an in-married wife) will have authority over a younger 'village daughter'. In sum, a certain configuration of the pastoral presence paved the way for the later encounter with the New Zealand administration's health programs and prompted the creation of 'women's committees'. These committees reinforced an awareness of the existence of women as a group, a fundamentally new category in Samoan culture at the *faamatai* level (which recognised *matai*, their sisters or daughters, their brothers and their wives, in this order of value and reciprocal determination).

This awareness was quickly affirmed. As early as 1852, the missionaries decided that the living of the village teacher (the pastors trained by the missionaries) should be provided entirely by the villages (in the beginning, London headquarters had subsidised them). Of course the villages furnished the pastor with bed and board, and the texts tell us just how

constant and abundant the gifts of food were. But for the rest (everything that required imported objects and therefore money), help had to come from London. From the outset, the missionaries had accustomed the Samoans to making a special contribution, in May, to the Missionary Society (the gifts were sent to headquarters). They also instilled the habit of making the same kind of gift to the pastor, again once a year, this time at the beginning of the year. As often happened in those years, the *matai* wanted to organise the missionaries' decisions by local decree and to impose fines on those who failed to attend church, for example; Turner tells how he spent his time trying to make the *matai* understand that whatever was obtained by obligation would not be right, and that they must not confuse their 'legislative' powers with 'religion', where everyone is 'at liberty to search the Scriptures and worship God'.⁷² In the discussions where the Samoans were not very happy about having to make a second annual contribution (to which the missionaries replied that the Bible teaches the duty of reciprocity; the teacher works for them, he brings them the word of God, he teaches, and, as Turner says, 'the man who does *their* work should be paid by *them*'), Turner tells how the *matai* suggested that 'the *women* pay the teacher one year, and the *men* the next, and so on alternating', a proposition the missionaries obviously did not accept.⁷³

The new female identity thus created had difficulty reconciling the two previously sharply opposed components. On the one hand, there was the woman as heterosexual partner (*fafine*) and, on the other, the 'village daughter' (*teine, tamaitai*) whose body was 'responsible' for her family's *matai* name and who never mingled her village identity with her life as a married woman, and even less with her life as a sexual being.⁷⁴ When this identity encountered another, more recent innovation, salaried work (a still very limited sector), it gave rise to the figure of the female employee (office worker, shop attendant) who is clearly subject to unequal treatment (salary, ambiguous attitudes, even sexual harassment) by her superior, usually a male. The latter plays heavily on the ambiguity of the new figure. Normally he should act very shy, reserved if not retiring in the presence of a woman regarded as a 'village daughter' (*tamaitai*). As this is hardly compatible with the needs of the modern workplace — or rather as today's work is not done within the logic of the *nuu* sacred circle — he tends to privilege the other aspect, that of *fafine*. Such is the outcome of the contradiction inherent in this composite figure, which mingles elements from levels one (*teine, tamaitai*) and two (*fafine*). For the time being the transition is in progress, and the urban setting in which men and women relate is facing a serious challenge from which anything can emerge, including the installation of a cruel inequality that Samoan women have never yet encountered. Another striking result is that, around the small town, around the women in the workplace, a population of women and their friends is growing up which, for the first time, feels it has its word to say in national political life. This fringe of the population weighed heavily in the referendum (see below) which recently led to the partial introduction of universal suffrage (insofar as it was more particularly the peri-urban population that participated in 1990 vote).

The other outcome, the new image of the married couple, has for the moment produced far fewer contradictions, owing to a combination of circumstances. Because tradition dictates that the spouse must be found in a village other than one's own — this rule is still seldom infringed — because the reasons for this rule have to do with the non-sexual

image of the woman in her own village (all her life she remains a 'village' daughter, a daughter of a *matai* name and therefore a daughter of the village circle of *matai* names), the couple's public life, to put it succinctly, is in the image of a brother—sister pair: surrounded by taboos on the verbal expression and the gestual demonstration of anything that might suggest a sexual relationship. By promoting the sanctity of marriage, the Mission assuredly altered the practice of serial marriages — a high-ranking man might carry on marital relationships with several women, each of whom lived in a different village, but it seems these relations were successive rather than concomitant, with the possibility of backtracking (personal notes). But it did not evacuate the highly valued central image of the brother—sister pair. We thus see that peoples' present-day representation of the village — which includes this new dimension of the distinctive men/women opposition — did not destroy, on this point at least, the idea that, in any one village, these men and these women are first of all (in public, in the 'daytime') like brothers and sisters. To be sure, the high value placed on the couple in terms of 'man/woman' led to a certain confusion between the wives and the daughters of the village as far as the organisation of community decisions was concerned, and that is a radically new phenomenon. But for the time being, when it comes to this new category of 'women' in the village, the prevailing image is still that of the woman-as-sister (which is no longer true in the world of salaried work).

Here, too, we can see the boundary between a secondary change and fundamental transformation. Extrapolating retroactively, we can say that, prior to the Mission, there was a primary level at which men and women were defined with respect to each other, through reference to the *matai* name: the women were the daughters of this name, the men were defined first of all as their brothers (and the man designated to carry the name and become *matai* was chosen by the supernatural will of his elder sister: she somehow 'knew' that this brother was best qualified to reincarnate the ancestor). At another level, men and women were viewed as sexual partners, and the woman was the so-called 'weak' member of this relationship. Today in the villages the first level still prevails over the second. Were this tendency to be reversed, the woman would be reduced to the role of sexual object, which would rapidly annihilate the *faamatai* by abolishing the principal area of prohibitions (connected with the body and especially sexuality) applying to the daughters of the *matai* name and enabling this name to maintain a rank and therefore its 'life' in the circle of village names.

But when the first level meets with Christianity, it sometimes presents a universal aspect: a 'human race', *tagata* under the eye of a universal god, but which is made up of brothers and sisters only, at least when these beings are precisely under the eye of God, in other words in the social and cosmological 'daytime' (visible, etc.) — for 'at night', relationships change. This leads adolescents in particular to feel they are living in a strange, difficult world, where open seduction remains forbidden, but where part of the social domain which created and maintained these taboos (the village as *nuu*) is disappearing, in particular the young peoples' integration in these respective *nuu* groups, under the eye of the *matai* and away from the wives. Increasingly young people feel themselves to be human beings of the two sexes (men and women: *tagata*) and no longer members of the *nuu* (non-*matai* men gathered in their *nuu* called 'the strength of the village' and the 'village daughters' — *tamaitai*); but they are still immersed in the ideology, very much alive in their parents, of

a world governed by the *faamatai*, and therefore a world of ‘brothers/sisters’, a world that can be breached only in the absence of watchful eyes (at ‘night’). Hence both the many possibilities of sexual misconduct and, almost inevitably, a harsh awakening upon return to the light of ‘day’: public shaming in front of the whole village, serious psychological crises, sometimes suicides, or the salvation of emigration when possible.

Another unforeseen consequence of the pastor’s new status concerns the circulation of money and, although timidly for the moment, the emergence of a social group which for the first time is not the product of the *faamatai*. If the village is big enough, the pastor can become rich. The weekly gifts are marked by competition on the part of the various families of the village with respect to the ‘sister of the village’. Of course, like all Samoans, the pastor and his family put a portion of these gifts back into circulation in ceremonial exchanges. Nevertheless, it is striking to see that a number of men (and a few women) who today voice modern opinions on economics and politics (see below) are the children of pastors: their relation to the *faamatai* was less restrictive (part of their identity was formed in their nuclear families since a pastor’s family is somewhat set apart from the pastor’s genealogical extended family), and their relatively comfortable lives gave them greater access to books, scholarships, imported goods and foreign travel.⁷⁵

The *faamatai* and the economic sphere

As I indicated at the outset, what strikes the observer here is the duality of people’s behaviour towards what we call ‘things’: some subscribe to an ideology of consensual sharing and others to rampant egotism.

Before going any further, I would like to recall my method. I am not going to draw up a checklist of what, for us, comes under the heading of ‘economy’ and then look at Samoa to see what items are present. This would replace comparative analysis with a run-of-the mill ethnocentrism. Instead, I will confront two conceptions: ours, which talks about ‘things’, ‘goods’, their ‘market’ value etc., and the Samoan perception, but apprehended first with respect to the *faamatai* and then stepping back from it. In the *faamatai*, the site where genealogical relationships are perpetuated, everything is somehow seen in terms of relations, nothing in terms of things. An initial comparison with our mode of perception immediately pinpoints the matter of land: for us in the West, it is a commodity, but for Samoans, it is a *matai* name; it is alienable for us (it can be bought and sold), it is inalienable for them. Next we notice that a number of other things (what we call ‘things’) are not connected with the *faamatai*. This time it is our perspective — the continuation of a search corresponding to our category ‘thing’ — which leads us to perceive these phenomena, whereas Samoans do not elaborate any ideological system concerning them. Having come to this point and looking back to where we started, we are surprised: the Samoan attitude towards things is anything but a demonstration of *faamatai*-style sociability.

Because this second aspect gives no hint of a fundamental transformation in the making, we will evoke it first, before coming back to the things governed by the *faamatai*: land and houses, where the boundary that would signal such a transformation is, on the contrary, very close. This is another paradox. Things that are new, introduced, dazzling signs of European industrial culture are massively present in Samoa and are the object of bitter

competition — yet they give no sign of provoking fundamental transformation. Alternatively, that which has been present from the dawn of time, namely the bond with the land, manifests a will to change, at least if one listens to the official government line — and it is the government itself which claims to want to hasten this change.

New objects

In Samoa, new objects, from carpenter's tools to cars, from electric refrigerators to radios, clothing and jewellery, clearly fall under the heading of private property. At the village level, there is no general authority over these objects: they belong to a family and the relationship with them stops there. Very clearly the notion of family in this case no longer refers to the extended family defined by the *matai* name, *aiga*, but to the 'household' (but still called *aiga* in Samoan), composed of a couple and their married children (those who have stayed at home), grandchildren, a couple of which one member is closely related to the *matai* name, to which may be added brothers or sisters of each of the spouses with their young or married children. And even at the household level, it must again be said that the object belongs to the person who bought or received it. The capacity to possess money, the position of receiver on occasions when gifts are given, all clearly mean that valuable objects come under the authority of the elders. But even in this case, people do not say 'the radio belongs to the household of couple X'; they say: 'It's X's radio (naming the head of house)'. At most one can say that an older person can easily ask a younger person to use an object that belongs to him/her, even if it remains more a request than an order.

In this area, Samoans are Western industry's dream consumers — or would be if they had the means to satisfy all their desires. If one were to believe what they say or do as soon as they have a little money, they would buy more than their houses can hold. To be sure, few Samoans have salaried jobs, but money circulates throughout the country in ceremonial exchanges, coming into the system from those who give money instead of fine mats or pigs: salaried workers, emigrants who return home for festivities, take part in all of the ceremonies involving a member of their extended family (life-cycle rituals, but also the bestowal of a new *matai*, the construction of a 'large house' *fale tele* or a church: in these three cases, the whole village participates), and finally relatives living in eastern Samoa (or 'American' Samoa, as Samoans also call it), who, unlike their cousins in the west, are almost all salaried, in American dollars (they sometimes go so far as to give a television or even a used car).⁷⁶

The goods people are most interested in are motor vehicles, radios, televisions, colourful clothes, perfume, tools, refrigerators. The motor vehicle is a status symbol: it is much used to transport relatives, neighbours, friends. In Samoa, people are constantly visiting from village to village owing to the far-flung kinship network. A hundred years ago they would go on foot or navigate along the coast, using long, wide-bodied rowboats. But the distances are great: to get from the east coast of the island of Upolu to the western side of Savaii, one must cover 150 kilometres of land as the crow flies (and therefore much more by the winding roads), not counting the boat-crossing. Today [early 1990s] people use the bus or the car, for those families which own one (inter-island travel is by ferry). The number of cars is growing fast: traffic jams in Apia, completely inconceivable even ten years ago, have become common in the town centre — which recently was obliged to put in traffic lights,

a curiosity for some time ... and a source of accidents, as the old tacit rules of right-of-way mingle with the new colour code.

The radio has long been a common household item, and every house has one. This is, it should be said in passing, an essential tool of Samoan democracy: Parliamentary debates are broadcast in their entirety, in real time, and are closely followed in all villages. Not because people are fascinated with all that is said — some debates on foreign policy or municipal sanitation are even somewhat obscure for some villagers — but because everyone knows the names of all members of Parliament (they are all *matai*) and because debate on the floor is a rhetorical contest exactly like those that take place in the ‘village councils’ (*fono*); the Parliament is also called *Fono*: it is ‘the country’s *fono*’. Verbal jousting in Parliament employs the same rhetorical figures, the same stock metaphors drawn from legend and myth, from stories of village foundations ... and from the Bible. When Parliament is in session, each village discusses the daily parliamentary ‘victories’ and ‘defeats’ of this *matai* or that. In addition to this aspect, when it comes to debates on questions of general interest (taxes, etc.), people listen to and comment on the content as much as the form. Television on the other hand has long been used to watch programs from American Samoa, re-runs of American series: all children are familiar with *Days of Our Lives* or *Charlie’s Angels*. More recently, Western Samoa has undertaken its own programming, and the present government consistently uses this new tool to broadcast, during the news, a number of what come down to party-political speeches. But this is all too recent for us to be able to measure the consequences.

There is no need to go into detail about the Samoans’ taste for perfume, well known throughout Polynesia, where, by virtue of ancient beliefs whose content is no longer even formulated (the ‘light’, the radiance and the fragrance of the chief’s sacred power [*mana*]), men and women are eager to acquire bright colours and perfume bottles of all sorts. Last of all, men — and women, it should be stressed — buy, whenever possible, tools (for cutting wood, doing mechanical jobs, etc.) foremost of which is the lawnmower! There is a basic opposition in Samoan cosmology between the head, the front or the centre, and the back. For instance, the front of every house must face the centre of the village and/or the road: it is the noble part. Every household is proud of their well-kept front yard: an impeccable lawn (the children’s first chore in the morning is to pick up the leaves, cigarette butts and whatever else the wind has deposited during the night), relentlessly mowed, or the carefully spread and renewed white sand, or the small, carefully swept corals.

In short, after working on the plantation, in the late afternoon, before prayers (held at sunset: the division between *Ao* and *Po*, both material and cosmological day and night), it is not unusual to see a Samoan use his state-of-the-art gas-powered lawn mower just received from his New Zealand cousins, then open his refrigerator and take out a glass of soda that has been chilling, turn on his TV to listen to the popular program already broadcast on radio announcing the deaths, births and marriages sent in daily by families so that everyone in the country, primarily far-flung relatives, is immediately informed (and can set about preparing the objects they will need to bring to the ceremony) and finally put on his flowered shirt, and after having perfumed himself, take his car to visit a female relative a few villages down the road in order to arrange for a number of fine mats for the upcoming wedding.⁷⁷

Every object mentioned in this account of the end of a day is considered private property (except for the fine mats). If a neighbour, or even a cousin (from a different household), wants to borrow or use one of these items, he will spontaneously propose money or another object in return. That is not surprising, you may say; it is a bit like that in the West, where these items come from. But what is surprising, or rather what gives one the impression of observing something specifically Samoan, is seeing this type of individualistic, commercial relationship taking place between people who have accustomed the observer to seeing and thinking of everything in terms of a group sharing everything around a circle according to a unanimously respected hierarchy. When, using the method we set out, one has *first of all* observed the *faamatai*, with its obligations of mutual aid and reciprocity in conducting ceremonies and the exchanges that go with them, where people manipulate food (including bread and corned beef), pigs and fine mats, one is somewhat taken aback to hear that the same individuals find it perfectly normal to pay to borrow a lawn mower or to be driven into town.

The other aspect that comes as a great surprise to the visitor is the fact that this presence of Western goods and services as well as the way people relate to them seems never to conflict with any aspect of the sphere of the *faamatai*. It is simply a different matter. The same people who, when it comes to buying or using these objects, vie with each other, count every penny, never lend without something in return, and know how to convey the idea that 'What's mine is mine', assiduously fulfill all the obligations pertaining to family and village solidarity with the acts of 'respect' required between younger and older members of the *nuu* (*aganuu, faamatai*). It is also instructive to see that Samoans are astonished that we should be surprised their compartmentalising these attitudes. For them there is nothing unusual in this since the two domains are completely separate.

Objects: a movable boundary

This distinction makes us realise that the boundary for the possession and utilisation of these objects — a limit which, if it were to be exceeded, would lead to a fundamental transformation — is hard to imagine. Seeing the behaviour of the Samoans who, though still in the minority, amass all these objects, one tells oneself that, even the day the whole country keeps its food in the refrigerator, replaces its machetes with lawn mowers and drives around in cars, nothing will have changed. This sounds like a pretty bold prediction, but it is meant to reflect a conviction I felt strongly during my fieldwork. Because the intrusion of these objects in no way affects the *faamatai* (or any of its corollaries), the secondary changes introduced by these objects will remain secondary.

One very clear sign is the way Samoan houses fill up with these objects without any change resulting in their structure and use. Even a house with a television and a refrigerator remains first and foremost a temple and a place for formal meetings in the sight of God. If people are watching television, and guests arrive from another village, they immediately switch off the program, and everyone sits down in a circle on the ground and declaims the long sequence of formulas necessary to lift the taboo on entry and the opposition distinguishing people from different villages so they may become a group united at a higher level: the sacred formulas relating the foundation of each village are exchanged. The day

someone says: 'Wait, my soap opera isn't over!', the society I am describing will no longer exist; but for the moment, such an attitude (in an adult) is unthinkable. However cluttered a house may be, it is always organised so as to leave a large circular space clear, unfurnished, so that a meeting can take place at any moment. The day a notion of comfortable furnishings takes precedence over the rules of circle meetings, this too will mean that the society in question is no longer the same. For the moment there is no sign of anything of this kind either.

The foregoing analysis is obviously restricted to the way objects are used. However, we know all too well that one item, the television, can itself be a messenger of many new things. When all Samoan TV showed were American serials, which amused everyone because their world seemed so strange and unreal, the impact on everyday social conduct was zero. Now that TV is on the way to becoming a tool of power in local political struggles, many things may change, and in the near future. Moreover, another recent item is creating problems. The price of VCRs has dropped in the last few years, as we all know, and emigrants now bring back or send home this kind of material. All of a sudden, more and more video shops have opened up, and they sell everything. The magic of the cinema (the theatre, the screen, the size of the pictures), everything that helped create a distance and make the film an unreal world with respect to Samoa, has disappeared: to those who watch videos as they would a documentary, everything seems 'true', like a book — at least this is the attitude I thought I perceived. If this is indeed the case, then the impact of videos may well be of an altogether different nature.

Whatever may come of this unclear future, the material world of today's Samoans is unsettling; not particularly for them of course, but for the visitor. At first he does not feel as if he is in a foreign country. So many things are familiar; just as, seeing the churches, he feels as though he is in a European village. But gradually a feeling of unfamiliarity sets in. There are far too many churches for it to be 'like home'; it is the same Bible, but one quickly has to admit that the organisation of the service shows more concern for local *faamatai* hierarchy than for the soul's salvation. And those familiar objects all divided into two categories that have nothing to do with each other. White bread, tinned fish or corned beef (but not the other items) and the packages of hardtack (big hard biscuits that keep forever) are given, returned, given again, like fine mats, in the course of ceremonies.⁷⁸ They belong to the ceremonial circuit. But other foods and household items are not objects of exchange. We could continue in the same vein for attitudes in the home, at work, etc. For the Western visitor, the impression is one of constant oscillation: hardly has it entered his head that, on this point, Samoans are 'like us', always have been or have become acculturated, than he encounters another element which abruptly puts them at the other end of the scale of cultural variations.

Houses and land

The objects we have been discussing until now are privately owned. This is visible from the way individuals express ownership and lending and borrowing. Simple observation of the language itself provides the framework for their classification. The possessive adjectives and pronouns used with these objects are from the *-a-* group: 'my', is *la'u*, 'your', *lau*, 'his/her',

sau, etc. There is another group of possessives, however, indicated by *-o-*: *lo'u*, *lou*, *sou*, etc. The distinction is common to all Polynesian languages, extending even to the Austronesian family.⁷⁹ It opposes objects whose owner is the cause of the owning (the *-a-* group) to those whose owner is not the cause of the owning (group *-o-*).⁸⁰ In the latter group, Samoan places the different notions of the *faamatai* ('my *matai* title', 'my family', 'my village', 'my custom'), etc., parts of the body ('my head', etc.) and kin terms ('my father', 'my cousin', etc.), which, in view of the way the rule is stated, comes as no surprise: it is not the incumbent *matai* who is at the origin of the possession of his title, it is not individual who created his body.⁸¹ But in this same group one also finds land and houses. In effect, many people in the South Pacific take for it granted that 'the land owns the people' and not the other way around.⁸²

The formula holds for both land and houses. When a Samoan talks about 'his' house, he means: the house of his family, the house of his ancestors. The house is not privately owned — it is fact inalienable. Every house stands on a family land — yet no land is privately owned either (see below for the nuances). A family land belongs to the *matai* name, to the founding ancestor, as it were. But he himself received it from the gods or from another *matai*. Ultimately everything can be traced back to the divine, the only element that is the origin and the cause of ownership. Houses therefore always belong to an *aiga* family. And the word for 'house', *fale* refers not so much to the roof and walls as to the relationship between those who live there and the ancestors, manifested by the fact that these people were able to bring (the building materials of) a house to this place.

Let us examine the first kind of house, called *fale Samoa*, the 'Samoan house'. To be sure, there are several types of house, from the 'large house' *fale tele*, the founding house and the like, also called 'house for guests', down to the little huts built over the stone oven, and in between, the houses lodging the various family-households that make up the local residential core of the extended family.⁸³ The first are big and round, the second small and round, the third are oval, or in more recent times, rectangular. But all are comprised of a foundation of large stones in between which are driven hardwood posts, regularly spaced around the circular, elliptical or (more recently) the rectangular perimeter of the foundation; these posts support a roof which too is conical, elliptical or four-sided, made of thatch (coconut palms or sugar cane leaves) or (more recently) corrugated metal.

With the exception of the more recent corrugated metal, which appears to be gaining ground [and became generalized after the two hurricanes of the early 1990s], the building materials are taken from the family land and thus belong to this land. Significantly, in the nineteenth century, when a couple married, the gifts from the boy's family might include, not only food (pigs, taros), but also the necessary building materials for a house (the hardwood posts, which were difficult to obtain, and the roof, by far the most delicate component), as opposed to the goods given by the woman's people, consisting of fine mats and tapas. The missionaries tell how these pieces were transported: the house, which was a wedding gift, could be dismantled and moved⁸⁴ and yet it was inalienable.

In short, the 'house', both a building and a social unit, is not a privately owned commodity. The obvious origin of a fundamental transformation would be that it become private property, something conceivable only if the land itself were to become alienable. This is, however, not the case (see below).

New houses

It would seem that a new element has crept innocently enough into the picture: imported materials. By virtue of the non-contradictory character (*vis-à-vis* the *faamatai*) of purchased privately owned objects, as we have seen, building materials were imported early on and rapidly adopted, the houses built by the nineteenth-century European settlers serving as a model. Corrugated metal replaced thatch because it lasted longer (people discovered only later that it provides poor insulation from the heat, but since Samoan houses do not have walls, the air still circulates). Until then nothing seems to have changed. But this opened the way for new materials: brick, cinderblock, concrete. Some families began building Samoan houses with a foundation and sometimes even pillars made of cement, then ‘*papalagi* houses’, with walls made of wood and even cinderblocks — while keeping the interior architecture which allowed them to regard the house as the site of a sacred circle that could be activated anytime a meeting was held there: rooms were added on to one side or a second story was built, but on the ground floor, at the centre of the house, a large room stood empty.

Two consequences resulted. First of all, the house became immovable — whereas the traditional house was considered to be moveable (see note above: the posts were merely wedged between the stones, and the roof could be transported like an overturned boat). Of course the founding site (of the *matai* name) was fixed; even when it is rebuilt, the founding house remains in (approximately) the same place; but in theory the family *matai* can decide (if the family meeting attended by most of the members upholds the decision) to banish a given household, or a household can decide to move in with another set of relatives. The second consequence was that the fixed house becomes charged with private investment (the building materials) which, following the logic already outlined in the case of private goods, belongs to an owner and therefore must follow him. But clearly a cinderblock house cannot be dismantled. This unforeseen consequence, this intrusion of the privately owned object into the context of the ‘house’ (*fale*) has raised the possibility of an altogether new strategy.

In the last fifteen years, small house-owners have begun to display a new attitude: households have started enclosing the land (which is becoming then more like a garden) surrounding the permanent house, thus creating in the middle of the — theoretically indivisible — extended family land a semi-private space. They continue to say that the land comprising this space is inalienable, but the fence now makes it hard for the authority of the family council headed by the *matai* to have a say in the way the land is used. Quite naturally those who act in this way consider it normal for all or some of their children to live in this house, but therefore also on this land, after their death. This is obviously what happens and used to happen in general, except that the ideology of the former succession was entirely different. The *matai*, representing the will of all, *did not forbid* X’s children to remain on the land that their father had occupied and cultivated, for these children seemed, like their father, to be people who ‘cared about the extended family (*tausi le aiga*)’, people who showed they never forgot the rules of solidarity. But the reasoning has changed. The idea is now developing that the children will stay ‘because their father paid for the cement to build the house’, which as one can easily guess, gives the heirs less encouragement to remember their debt to the family group. Wherever this occurs (especially in the villages surrounding the

town), one can already see the solidarity customary in family exchanges coming unravelled, with each household trying to do as little as possible; for each has begun to think of its own perpetuation, and not necessarily in terms of the continuation of the extended family (that of the *matai* name, and therefore the idea that one must give as much as possible in the exchanges which, vis-à-vis the other families, are supposed to assert the 'life' of the family name, of the *matai* name).

Just as the TV and the VCR, a priori privately owned objects, furtively introduce a new dimension through the content of their images, the building materials which, in the form of a sack of cement, seem as remote from anything to do with the *faamatai* as a mechanic's tool box, can permeate an object at the heart of the *faamatai* — the house — and open the way for a possible fundamental transformation in the notion of ownership.

Land: public, family and private

The foregoing description has already taken us to the heart of the land problem. We saw a tendency to establish a private relationship with a plot of land. This is patently in contradiction with the traditional status — still in force — of family lands. But certain aspects resemble the case of the four per cent of the land fallen under private law during the colonial period and of the sixteen per cent of the land which constitutes the public domain. I will be brief here, as the reader can find more detailed information in an earlier study I made of this question.⁸⁵

From the standpoint of the *faamatai*, all land is family land. The land that makes up the world is the *lalolagi*, 'that which is under the sky', and God is its sole owner. Of this expanse, the inhabitable growing lands (which in Samoa include even very steep mountain slopes to which taro and banana trees cling) are *fanua*, a word which also designates the placenta. No more needs to be said: throughout Oceania, people consider that they were brought into the world by the land (which owns them).⁸⁶ From the coast to the ridges of the mountains occupying the interior of every island in Samoa, the land belongs first and foremost to the village, under the authority of the *nuu*, and therefore of the council of the *matai* of the *nuu*. What is not under cultivation now, will be some day; what was, no longer is or is resting in fallow. The bulk of local land is comprised of family lands, each under the authority of the family *matai*, stretching outwards from the founding house, down towards the sea and up the mountainside (the village council can always decide that a plot should be cultivated in common, if only in preparation for a large-scale exchange in which this village will compete with another). The village has authority over the people who live in it, but it cannot unmake what makes it: it is a circle of names, these names are ancestors' names as well as land titles, thus the *nuu* is a circle of family land-holdings.

Before the Europeans arrived, one hundred per cent of the lands were family lands (*fanua o aiga*). The *matai* has the authority to accept the arrival of new relatives or people who thus become 'adopted' members of the family (*aiga fai*). In the nineteenth century, here as elsewhere, Europeans would contract to occupy a plot and build a house or a store. The European thought he was 'buying' the land when he handed over objects or money. The *matai* thought he was granting an adoption, an unlimited right of use (but which could be revoked by family consensus). Some later *matai* probably understood the meaning of buying

and agreed to transactions for which they had not received the corresponding authority — since it did not exist. All of this transpired in a context of endemic warfare between districts (end of the nineteenth century), in other words between ‘great’ *matai* who were in part manipulated by factions of the small European trading-community. The latter was seeking a foreign power to take Samoa on as a colony, but was torn internally by conflicting wills, some favouring Germany, others England, yet others the United States. During this period, the search was on for money, in particular for the purchase of arms.

Fortunately these purchases of land were few, while others were invalidated by Germany when Samoa finally fell to its lot, not out of a philanthropic concern for the people of Polynesia, but because the aim of the colonial power was to develop profitable coconut plantations rather than to divide up the territory into small plots for individual settlers. The short German presence (1898–1914) was not enough to fulfill the plan for large-scale exploitation. When New Zealand was granted Western Samoa in ‘mandate’, four per cent of the land had been recognised by the Germans as privately owned and remained so (even today these lands, most of which are located close to town, can be bought and sold); sixteen per cent of the lands, corresponding to the German plantations, were confiscated and frozen as ‘Crown lands’, then at independence, they became public lands. The rest (80 per cent) remained under control of the *faamatai*, which made Samoa an almost unique case in contemporary Polynesia.

It is clear that, if these lands were ever to come under private ownership, the whole *faamatai* would collapse. Samoans do everything required by the *faamatai* because — they say in many ways — this participation is what builds and maintains their feeling of being ‘at home’ when they are in their house and on their land. The same sentiment is expressed in its negative version: ‘If I no longer take part in the exchanges, in the name of what could I stay on this land?’ In a system where there is no private property, permanence is manifested by belonging: by giving, one constantly reaffirms: ‘I belong to this name, therefore to this land!’ No one is saying here that life in a society still firmly governed by the *faamatai* is better or worse than in a society governed by private ownership. What is important is that the status of the land is the basis of everything. That is the boundary between change and fundamental transformation.

Do we see any such transformation on the horizon? Perhaps. It happens that the present government [of the early 1990s] is very concerned with bringing in money to make up for the drop in remittances from Samoans working abroad (who suffer from a high rate of unemployment in their host countries and whose children, born abroad and hoping to enter the job market there, are less inclined to give everything they earn to their relatives back home), has repeatedly called for more investment and has clearly said that Parliament should consider changing the status of the land so as to enable investors to buy or rent property.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the government, which at the beginning of independence used public lands (the 16 per cent inherited from the German period) for state farms, is now dividing these lands into plots to rent to Samoan families (on very long leases), which considerably augments private land-holding and social inequality: these families use the lands for commercial-type plantations, and only the well-off (already involved in trade) have the means to pay the rent and use a vehicle to work these lands.

The *faamatai* and politics

The vote

This point could take a whole chapter on its own, so I must be content with an allusive treatment. The problem has to do with the way the idea of political representation, introduced by European influence, made its way into the *faamatai*.

Before independence, the sacred decision-making circles were held at the level of a family, a village and a group of villages. In each of these cases, the *matai* represented his own people. He was chosen by his people and could be dismissed by them.⁸⁸ The ‘family circle’ (*aiga potopoto*) met and made what one can call a ‘democratic’ choice, since everyone could participate and voice their opinion. This was a special kind of democracy, however, since the final decision was reached, not by vote, but by consensus, a very specific type of unanimity in which, to be sure some opinions carried more weight than others, but where in the end each person, by consent or tacitly accepted constraint (while awaiting a better occasion to impose his own viewpoint), communed in the decision by the ritual consumption of *kava*, with the ancestors and God as witnesses. We have seen the process.⁸⁹ The *matai* thus chosen was the consensual representative of the whole group. In the village council (*fono*), decisions were reached in the same way. Everything seems to indicate that Samoans were unaware of the very idea of decision by majority vote.

When, at independence, God was placed at the head of the Constitution and the village *fono* was taken as a model for the country’s *Fono* — the Parliament — it was obvious to the members of the Constituent Assembly that, to be a member of Parliament, one had to be a *matai*. Only those who had already undergone a preliminary selection giving them the capacity to represent a group could claim to represent an even larger group. The member of Parliament would represent a district (the country was divided into some forty districts, following old boundary lines, with the addition of a few new ones), and therefore a group of villages, and therefore a group of *aiga* families, each of which was already represented at the local level by its respective *matai*. Naturally enough, even if it seemed shocking to the outside observer who saw it as the chiefs exercising a hold over the people, it was decided that only *matai* would be eligible to vote and to stand for parliamentary election.

The preservation of this tradition was accompanied by a new element, however. The foreign experts helping draft the Constitution had the idea of including the possibility of electing members of Parliament by a majority of the votes expressed.⁹⁰ It must be said here that the practice of voting, apparently unknown before the arrival of Europeans, was clearly demonstrated to the Samoans as it operated in the predominantly European trading community which made up the town of Apia and which elected ‘consuls’. Majority rule was also the practice in the missionaries’ assemblies where, in the early days (1840s–1850s), decisions about the work of the Mission were taken by consultation among the ten or so missionaries living in Samoa. The ‘native teachers’ looked on but did not participate.⁹¹ Last of all, at the time of independence, it was recognised that a number of the new State’s citizens of foreign extraction, Europeans or Chinese, were living as individuals (often on the 4 per cent or private lands), and could not legitimately be represented by a *matai*. A list of ‘individual voters’ was created for them, who would designate their members of Parliament by a simple majority of votes expressed (in the same proportion as the rest of population).

From the outset, voting was a part of political life and went with the citizenship extended to the descendants of the foreigners who had been settling in Samoa since the start of the nineteenth century. Everyone was a Samoan citizen, but the Constitution had created two lists of voters, the 'individuals' (a few thousands) and the 'districts' (in which only the *matai* were eligible to vote and to stand for election).⁹²

Since the possibility of voting existed, it was put to use in the district parliamentary elections, few in the beginning, but rapidly spreading to the majority of districts. In effect the status of the member of Parliament was ambiguous. On the one hand, he was going to sit in the 'country's *fono*', and this national sacred circle must obviously reproduce the rules governing the regional *fonos*: choice by consensus, as is proper when the higher beings (the ancestors) guarantee and witness every decision — to distinguish a 'winner' (*malo*) by majority vote indicates a war-like logic, a logic of the *malo*, which does not befit the circumstances. On the other hand, even though Samoa was a new State, it was adopting a 'government' that bore the name of *Malo*. Samoans had long known what a *Malo* government was: it was the government of the nineteenth-century consuls, that of the German governor, of the New Zealand administrator, who each time would appoint a council of *matai* but only in an advisory capacity. But the logic of the *Malo* admits a procedure which distinguishes winners from losers. With regard to the district, putting a choice to the vote was considered to be 'ugly'. Only consensus should be used. But people already knew that going to Parliament meant following a path of 'power' (*pule*) — the MP was called *faipule*.⁹³ Soon there were enough *matai* who considered it a good thing to stand for parliamentary election, even if X was already an MP and had every chance of being designated by consensus due to the fact that his *matai* name, for instance, was the greatest (the oldest) in the district. It was good to run against him because this was competition for 'power' (*pule*) and not only for 'sacred dignity' (*mamalu*) and seats around the 'sacred circle' (*alofi sa*) of the district *matai*.

In short, in the space of a few years, choice by consensus became rarer as the surge in the number of candidates made it necessary to proceed by vote. The worm was now in the fruit, from the point of view of the *faamatai*. An ideological element that had been clearly placed on the second level — voting was accepted for the few thousand 'individual' voters — had become mingled with elements from the first level: choosing among the *matai*. For the individual voters, the duty to vote for the number of members of Parliament allotted to them was a fact which in no way undermined the *faamatai*. In the first place, this population represented only a small portion of the country's total inhabitants. And in the second place, the distinction between this group of foreign extraction, which voted by universal suffrage, and the districts, in which only the *matai* were eligible to vote and to stand for election, was situated at a level which was not primary to the definition of the country. It lay at a secondary level, and these differences resolved into unity: everyone was a citizen of the new State. At independence, the full-blooded Samoans, people of mixed blood and the European residents who so desired all became 'Samoans'. Now, on the contrary, the vote is no longer a secondary element, since it enters into the very way the *matai*-member of Parliament is designated.

This designation is henceforth inscribed in both the traditional logic of the *faamatai* and in that of the *Malo*, the second being in a certain fashion included in the first: the *Malo*

is constructed by a meeting of the *matai* and therefore by the *faamatai*. But the logic of the *Malo* has introduced into this construction an element of its own (the logic of 'winning') which is borrowed from a different world: that of majority rule.

Side effects and possible fundamental transformations

One might think that none of this makes much difference. And that is effectively what everyone thought at the time. But the presence of voting at the heart of the system soon produced other repercussions. In a matter of some fifteen years, the state of mind changed from one in which the district elected the man who seemed 'worthy' (*mamalu*) to represent it, even if it was necessary to decide among a small number of candidates, to a different mentality in which ambitious men eager to sit in Parliament declared their candidacy and thought about how to win the election at any price. But those *matai* had retained their traditional prerogatives. One of these stipulates that a *matai* can always create another *matai* name and give it to a relative (or an adopted son) together with a land from the territory governed by the extended family of which he is *matai*. Creations of this type proliferated, especially in the year before an election, each candidate thus attempting to create a pool of voters. Every new *matai* thus created was one more elector and, reciprocity *oblige*, his voice was a vote for the candidate in question. Of course many of these creations were unlawful in the sense that no land was really given and no one waited for the new title to be registered by the Land and Title Court (which can take a long time because the job of this court is precisely to hold hearings and inquests to verify the validity and the authenticity of this new title).

In the mid-1980s, two consequences appeared simultaneously. First, the number of *matai* created in this manner soared, and second, a new generation of *matai* entered Parliament. Many of these new men wanted to break with the traditional views, which they felt to be backward looking, and open the country to exchanges with the outside. These MPs were much more attuned to foreign opinion, which continued to voice surprise that Samoa, together with Tonga, was still run by an 'oligarchy'. Owing to a variety of circumstances, the government managed to squeak through a referendum in which it proposed taking a step towards universal suffrage. As of 1990, all adults over the age of twenty-one are eligible to vote in parliamentary elections; but the right to stand for election by universal suffrage is still restricted to *matai*.

The referendum and its consequences sparked an immense, countrywide debate, which [was] still running [in 1992–1994]. The opinions expressed indicate that, for some, the move towards partial universal suffrage, which confirms the supremacy of the vote over consensus, has not crossed any boundary line which might lead to overturning the *faaSamoa*. Better still, those who hold these opinions and who back this change consider themselves the true defenders of the *faamatai*: they claim to have struck at the root of what they regard as the disastrous trend threatening to make the *matai* name an object of electoral manoeuvring, which would rapidly have ended in everyone, or nearly everyone, being a *matai*.

Their opponents remark ironically that this trend would have produced the same result as the referendum: with everyone a *matai*, everyone would be an elector. The jest was only half true, however. By virtue of the distinction between the brother's and the sister's roles within the *faamatai*, the traditional view holds that the role of *matai* should be filled by a

man rather than a woman, for that is where the ‘work of the family’ is done, whereas the women (those related by blood) are supposed to be in close communication with the divine, to ‘know’ the right decisions to make, and to thus advise their ‘brother’, who will promulgate and actualise these decisions.⁹⁴ The doubling of the number of *matai* concerned the men in particular. Consequently, when the government proposed the referendum, a notable proportion of women favoured a ‘yes’ to universal suffrage.⁹⁵

More seriously, opponents of universal suffrage evoked the very grave long-term consequences that could result from breaking the constitutive link between the sphere of government and politics (in short: the *Malo*), and that of the *faamatai*. Paradoxically people also brandished the idea that democracy would be diminished and social inequalities increased.

The first point gave rise to discussions in the village *fonos* and the newspapers. Those in favour of universal suffrage obviously cited the history of Western democracy: what could be more egalitarian than the principle of ‘one person, one vote’? But those in favour of the 1962 Constitution pointed to an often overlooked aspect: democratic supervision of the elected official. Because the *matai* is democratically chosen by his family — and above all because they can dismiss him at any moment — he is held in check by the principles of the overall system: family, village, etc. As he carries out his parliamentary duties, makes his decisions, he will have in mind the traditional values. Members of Parliament elected by universal suffrage, on the contrary, will develop the ideology that put them there: a distinction between their political duties, for the duration of a legislative mandate — during which only Parliament can remove them, in the event of serious misconduct — and their role as family *matai*. The sentiment of belonging will no longer attach to their family and through it, to the entire *faamatai*, but to the Parliament as a ‘political’ site, to the ‘political class’, as we say in the West, and therefore to two entirely new groupings with respect to the ideological principles of Samoan culture: daily town life and the political parties.⁹⁶

To conclude on this point, I will quote something that is said not altogether in jest. Those who deplore everything that contributes to separating politics from the *faamatai* say mischievously that their language supports their view; when the word ‘politic’ is transcribed into Samoan, it becomes *polokiki*, a word play suggesting that politics is like football (*polo*, a Samoan word taken from ‘ball’ and *kiki* from the verb ‘to kick’).⁹⁷ The image expresses the fear that politics may grow as far from the *faamatai* as the result of a Western football game from the supporters’ desire to win: however much they call upon the gods, the outcome depends on what the players do on the field. But this is not the Samoan conception of things. Samoans consider that what the players do on the field would be useless without the ‘sacred circle’ of supporters who come to watch their team play; this follows the same thinking as the traditional distinction between the respective roles of brother and sister. We have already stressed the importance of the pair of notions *tapuai/fai* (communication with the divine/action): the second is nothing without the first. The outcome of the game depends on the players’ action inasmuch as the action itself is the product of the supporters’ *tapuai*. This *tapuai* is much more than a prayer: it thinks into existence the ‘sacred circle’ indispensable to any action; when this happens, the players are no longer alone on the field, they are part of a whole (their families, their village, God). This is what the relationship

between the *Malo* and the *faamatai* should be, people say. When the two drift apart, when the *Malo* is no longer encompassed within the *faamatai* — for that is what we are talking about — but becomes a simple distinction between independent sets of principles, the *Malo* is no longer anything but *polokiki*. Here at the same time we have a definition of the boundary line, summed up in a play on words. If this transmutation of the *Malo* into *polokiki* were to become general and permanent, Samoa would without a doubt undergo a fundamental transformation.

The second aspect must also be inventoried: opponents of the new system fear an increase in the inequalities between urban and rural settings. One of the dynamics involved has just been mentioned: the possible emergence of a political class. Today most members of Parliament are city dwellers, at least part time, and have acquired daily habits which every day estrange them a little more from life in the village. Another dimension of the problem resides in the areas of law and policing. In the Constitution, the High Court obviously has supreme authority. And the authority of the police extends throughout the country. But in reality, the village authority claims its autonomy in the name of tradition: the council of the *matai* is the supreme local legislative and judicial authority, and its orders are carried out, if need be, by the group which functions as a police force: the *nuu* of the village sons (the men who are not *matai*). The result is a subtle sharing of powers. If the crime has been punished and compensated in the village according to customary law (payment of the homicide price, for example, in fine mats, etc.), it must still be judged by the system provided by the Constitution, and therefore by the court, in town; but the court will tend to reduce the sentence substantially. And if a village has to call in the police, it is because the local forces of order have failed, which brings considerable shame on the village in the eyes of the country at large. In reality, one practically never sees a policeman outside the capital, Apia. Samoans say that ‘the village police force is the *matai* system’, the ‘*faamatai*’. Nevertheless, the sentences pronounced by the village *matai* are normally restricted to fines or banishment — which is already a very powerful system. Violence is unlawful, in the name of Constitutional law: the *matai* cannot order that X’s house be burned or that the culprit be killed. Nevertheless it sometimes happens that, in the case of events of this kind, it is rumoured that the violence was ordered by the *matai of the village*: the latter may be arrested, but they are usually released for lack of evidence⁹⁸.

The same tension can be found in the Land and Title Court, which registers *matai* titles and settles disputes over successions. Traditionally there was no authority above the *faamatai*. In the event of a dispute (between lines for the succession to a *matai* name, between villages or districts when the conflict spread), there was no alternative but war to determine a winner (*malo*) and establish a ‘power zone’ (*itumalo*). The use of ‘force’ (*malosi*) reorganised things, but afterwards the representation still used the same standard of genealogical justification. This is the familiar logic of Polynesian *mana*: If X wins, it is really because he had more *mana*, and therefore he was genealogically superior; force merely upholds the principles of the *faamatai*.⁹⁹

An initial change was introduced by the German colonists, who sought, on the one hand, to eliminate occasions for local warfare and, on the other, to exert as much control as possible over the succession to titles so that the lands would not be snatched up by small

settlers (this was not in order to defend the Samoan people as such, but because, as I have said, there were plans to develop large-scale plantations controlled by the German firm DHPG). And so the Land and Title Court was created, which constituted a sort of central *fono*,¹⁰⁰ while taking care to stress their attachment to the values of the *faamatai*. The German judge, E. Schultz, claimed to be a specialist on Samoan customs — and in fact he did publish a number of distinguished academic articles in Germany — and he surrounded himself with *matai* of renown. The Court had the final word in disputes and officially registered the election of every *matai* in the country. Apparently the system worked, and continues to do so: for the time being, everyone considers that, even though this court is an instrument of the *Malo*, it nevertheless corresponds to the principles of the *faamatai* and acts as their safeguard.

Expressed in the form of a multi-level model, the general ideology still seems to be the following. At the first level, the *faamatai* encompasses the *Malo*: the members of Parliament, the members of the government, the judges of the Land and Title Court are all *matai*, ‘true *matai*’, imbued with the principles of the *faamatai*. The two domains are identical. The contradictory aspect (the use of force, the notion of winning by force) is subordinate. In point of fact, Samoa has been astonishingly peaceful since the start of the twentieth century, with no army and a police force limited primarily to urban areas. At the second level, the *Malo* wields its authority: Samoa is a State, justice is a matter for the central power, and even the *faamatai* is under its authority: a title must be ratified by the Court. But this court does not operate in contradiction with the *faamatai*: the judges decide by virtue of a ‘genealogical knowledge’ (obviously including every kind of discussion and manipulation imaginable, but which remain on the genealogical level), not on the order of a political power.

This ranking of principles¹⁰¹ indicates that it is at the same time the boundary line beyond which a fundamental transformation would be produced: the day a *matai* title could be registered or invalidated in the name of the reigning political power, according to an ideology of *polokiki*. This is the turn of events feared by today’s opponents of the introduction and extension of universal suffrage in parliamentary elections. It is not the observer’s place to decide whether or not this fear is founded. But it is his place to identify the boundary beyond which sociocultural dynamism could spill over into fundamental transformation. In the case of the political sphere, the limit is the inversion of the relationship between *Malo* and *faamatai*.

As can be guessed from these few examples, the issue of democracy is not as simple as the notion might suggest. For one thing, the Samoan paradox is no paradox at all when it asserts, by the voice of the partisans of the *faamatai*, that a system of political representation founded on customary chiefs can be a stronger guarantee of democracy than Western-style democracy itself. But to understand this, we must let go of our idea of ‘chief’ and look closely at the social reality of the Samoan *matai*, as we have attempted to do in this chapter. The *matai* want to be to the government, the *faamatai* wants to be to the *Malo* what the spectators are to their rugby team when two villages meet: the source of the action, by the fact of sitting down ‘in a circle’ and communicating with the divine (*tapuai*), thus gaining genuine ‘understanding’ (word base on the word ‘light’. When this hierarchy deteriorates, all that is left is football, *polokiki*. And to continue the play on words: in Samoan, supporters of

the *faamatai* distinguish between ‘Samoan-style democracy’, which they call *temokalasi faaSamoa* (consensual decision by virtue of the ‘knowledge’ gained by those in whom the ancestors live, the *matai* sitting down in a circle), and ‘Western-style democracy’, which they call ‘democracy *faaPapalagi*’.

But in this play on words, a good part of the country’s future also comes into play. Recently the pro-*faamatai* faction tried to bring the government before an international court of appeal on the grounds that the 1990 referendum on universal suffrage was unconstitutional. This initiative may astonish the Western observer. History seems to be repeating itself, as it were. Just as the German creation of the Land and Title Court, at the beginning of the twentieth century, was an accepted transformation, with the role of war in the *faamatai* being replaced by judicial procedure, so present-day opponents prefer to appeal to a court rather than to take up arms. Quite clearly the use of force to ensure the victory of the *faamatai* (in the event to overturn the 1990 referendum on universal suffrage), when one discusses this possibility with some of those in opposition, is rejected, ‘because it would go against the principles of the *faamatai*’, and they add, ‘it’s no good trying to defend a principle by its opposite’. It is even astonishing for a Westerner to see the extent to which fierce political antagonisms have not led to violence, and in guise of a conclusion, we can perhaps advance a generalisation.

The period of its identity that presently characterises Samoa, which we have been discussing since the beginning of the chapter and which has been taking shape ever since Samoans adopted Christianity as ‘their tradition’, will perhaps be judged an exception with regard to the overall history of Samoa. Perhaps it is only a parenthesis, a century of peace between the violence of the pre-colonial wars, when the idea of *malo* was the armed branch of the *faamatai*, and a new violence that is sometimes evoked of late, a violence which might spring from these new sites that elude the authority of the *faamatai*. First of all, the beginnings of urban violence, as gradually part of the town of Apia is no longer perceived as forming one or several *nuu*. And then violence on the part of a central power increasingly anxious to assert its authority as it distances itself from certain requirements of the *faamatai*. For instance, there is talk of arming the police — they do not presently carry weapons; there is talk of training soldiers with the aid of a few experts from Australia or New Zealand in order to create a small army; and, for the first time, in 1994, when a peaceful march on Parliament was announced by the opposition, one member of Parliament threatened to call in the New Zealand army.

Meanwhile, however, this peaceful interlude is well worth noting and reporting. It has been possible because traditional warfare, the tool of the *faamatai*, has been replaced by a combination of *faamatai* and *Malo*, traditional family chiefs and a national government, one example of which is the Land and Title Court; just like this other example of the central justice system, which takes into account the way villages have already dealt with the crime brought before the court. This interlude will last as long as the combination does not tilt towards an inequality that would introduce the logic of ‘winning’ by *malo*.¹⁰² It will be remembered that the official term for Government also means ‘victory’, *malo*, conveying a logic of warfare in which one side is the ‘winner’, *malo*; a logic of inequality. This interlude holds a lesson in hierarchical compromise between tradition and acculturation, between

social organisation and political power, between thought and action (*tapuai/fai*). Is this the exception, that of a small State in the South Pacific, with a unique history, one that has nothing to teach us? I do not think so. Rather, it should be seen as the fruit of a combination of the sacred and power spheres, which is not basically new, but which, when put into action in a community of 160,000 people, offers an interesting, more clear-cut formulation to the visitor interested in comparison.¹⁰³

Footnotes

- 1 See Tcherkézoff (1993b).
- 2 See Tcherkézoff (1983, 1989, 1994a).
- 3 In Samoa this is the place of the *ava*, the drink of the gods (what in the literature on Oceania is called ‘*kava*’): the only man allowed to circulate in this central space is the bearer of the single bowl from which each in turn will take a drink.
- 4 Modern anthropological literature on Samoa is almost entirely in English.
- 5 See Davidson (1967), Buck (1930), Gilson (1970), Krämer (1902), Keesing and Keesing (1956).
- 6 The term ‘secondary’ in no way means quantitatively less important. I am talking about a secondary level of the model used to translate the ethnographic observations, secondary with respect to the choice to give pride of place among the constituent elements of identity to the system of belonging.
- 7 Sometimes the fundamental transformation is triggered by an external factor, as was the case of the European arrival (Tcherkézoff 2004). But it can also result from an internal evolution (see below, the land-holding and political systems).
- 8 See Tcherkézoff (2003a: chapter 2).
- 9 For the Samoan terms, I have used the official transcription, which is different from that used by non-Samoan linguists, grammarians and lexicographers (glottal stops and vowel lengths are not indicated).
- 10 See Buck (1930), Freeman (1983), Holmes (1987), and personal notes (comments by visitors from other South Pacific countries overheard during the 1983 Pacific Games, held in Apia).
- 11 Samoans themselves occasionally use this expression when the conversation (or the song) is in English.
- 12 Today (and since the mid-nineteenth century) he has been replaced by the missionary God, but the new god inherited many features of the first.
- 13 For the history of the importation and presence of people from Melanesia, and for the Samoans’ attitude towards these ‘black’ men, see Meleisea (1980).
- 14 The history of the Chinese in Samoa obviously parallels that of the Melanesians, but the outcome is different, for far more workers were imported (never exceeding 2 200 present at one time, however, in other words 6 per cent of the Samoan population), the importation lasted longer and their relations with small-scale private European commerce were more frequent and closer. On the history of multi-culturalism in Samoa, see Tcherkézoff (2000c).
- 15 Children of Chinese extraction, with the exception of a more pronounced eye fold, almost always look on the whole like full-blooded Samoans.
- 16 One of the first missionaries, present in the 1840s, who made a detailed study of the language and helped translate the Bible, held that the word would have meant ‘bursting through the sky’ (Turner 1861: 9). [This view is shared by many Samoans, but in fact the idea of ‘bursting through’ is not part of the etymology; see Tcherkézoff (1999b); the reference to the ‘sky’ is more acceptable, even if it could have been a new folk etymology from early nineteenth century (Tcherkézoff 2003b). In any case, certain links between the Polynesian cosmological Sky and the supposed origin of the Europeans have been inferred by many Polynesian at the time of early encounters (Tcherkézoff 2004: chapter 9).]

- 17 Afterwards the government personnel changed, and the neo-traditionalist attitude, a certain wariness of trade with Europeans and tourism, gave way to an open-armed welcome to compensate the economic deficit (high unemployment among Samoans having emigrated to New Zealand and elsewhere whose remittances accounted for a quarter of the national budget), but also because the new personnel had a more universalistic ideology, paid more attention to development advisors and had a certain confidence in Western expertise (see Tcherkézoff 1992b, 2003a: chapter 3).
- 18 See Tcherkézoff (1992b). On Mead's book, see Tcherkézoff (2001a, 2001b).
- 19 Ideally situated half-way on the long passage between the United States and Australia, the well-sheltered port of Pago Pago was a supply stop for the great ships and then an American military base, now long closed (the Japanese had been expected to land during World War Two, but they did not get as far as Samoa).
- 20 Along with the 'French Polynesia' group, but the latter is not culturally homogeneous. The eastern group of islands (Manua and Tutuila) is much smaller.
- 21 The currency and the passport are American, but the inhabitants do not vote in American presidential elections, the group is not a state of the Union and they have their own parliament and governor. Nevertheless they do elect a representative to the American Congress.
- 22 The Mission, established in 1830, evangelised the whole population in the space of 30 years and rapidly became a local Church with an all-Samoan personnel. The Theological Seminary was known throughout the Pacific, and the 'teachers' trained there themselves soon struck out as missionaries to the westward islands (Tuvalu and Melanesia: Vanuatu, New Guinea, etc.).
- 23 The same sentiment possesses those who have emigrated (40,000 to New Zealand) and the airline connecting Samoa and New Zealand has a high rate of filled seats. From the economic standpoint, this is a severe and constant drain on emigrants' salaries.
- 24 Because it is a long trip (from the western tip of Savaii to Apia took two days by bus and boat, until the coastal roads around each island were recently paved, thus shortening travel time), villagers would come to town for several days, sleeping at the home of relatives or simply behind their stall on the floor of the (covered) market. (These long trips were no doubt instrumental in shaping a microcosmic social organisation inside the bus, where one finds a condensed version of the fabric of village social relations: see Tcherkézoff 1995b, 2003a: chapter 5.)
- 25 However the importance of English in secondary education — the sciences are taught in English — entails in part yet another selection: it is easier for those whose families have access to English (government employees, merchants) to complete their studies; this new division is also found in the opposition between town and country; nevertheless, teachers are quite hostile to any form of social class inequality (this hostility is a general feature of Samoan ideology; see Tcherkézoff 2003a: chapters 5–6 on the opposition between inequality and traditional hierarchy) and go to great lengths to help those who have less facility.
- 26 And when I use the shortened form, 'Samoa', I will also be referring to the western archipelago, which became a German colony in 1899, then a mandate of New Zealand until its independence in 1962.
- 27 Tensions ran high, and there was even an uprising resulting in several deaths at the end of the 1920s (see Field 1991). The story is a complicated one because the local merchant bourgeoisie played an important role in opposing New Zealand's economic supervision. This was not a struggle for national liberation, though, since New Zealand's administrative presence was more or less limited to the towns and their environs, and to the education and health sectors. In the 1950s, preparation for independence was a relatively cooperative effort and in any case a peaceful one. The Constituent Assembly included a large representation of the country's *matai* as well as two *papalagi* advisors representing Australia and New Zealand, one of whom was a well-known historian, J.W. Davidson, founder of the 'school' that studied Pacific colonial history from the colonised people's standpoint (see Davidson 1967).
- 28 See Meleisea (1987), Meleisea and Meleisea (1987).
- 29 For details and the evolution of the figures, see Tcherkézoff (2003a: chapter 3) and, for the nineteenth-century transformations (2000a, 2000b).
- 30 That is why the recent initiative (1990) in favour of universal suffrage stopped half-way: everyone was to be an elector but only the *matai* would be eligible. We will return to this point.
- 31 This is patent in the field study, but has not been remarked, except by Aiono, who made a point of it (see Aiono 1984, 1986, 1992 and a series of lectures given in Marseille in May 1994 at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales). Without mentioning these *nuu* groups, Meleisea, writing in English, rightly

- notes that *nuu* is more a 'polity' than a 'village' (see Meleisea 1987). See below note 43 for the nuances: the wives' group is not truly a *nuu*.
- 32 Samoans also say outright that the characteristic feature of their custom is the *faamatai*, the '*matai* system'. But this response is more typical of intellectuals, who spontaneously compare with foreign social systems 'without *matai*'. I am interested here in the fact that, even from a purely insider viewpoint, the order of things is *aganuu*. Each time someone wants to justify an obligation or a prohibition to a younger person, not to an outsider, they invoke the *aganuu* 'imperative'.
- 33 For the Samoans who put the word in writing, it is an institution and, as in English usage, they sometimes capitalise it (*Faamatai*). But the term designates first of all the set of social principles which stem from the system of belonging constituted by the transmission and reproduction of the *matai* names. For Samoans, it is the functional equivalent of our reference to 'democracy' or 'equality'. Everything connected with social relations flows from, or at least, people say, *should* flow from the *faamatai*, from the 'spirit of mataism' (to use a local English neologism). Furthermore, in the current political debate, *faamatai* can also mean an embryonic political party or all the individual *matai* taken together. Recently, in reaction to certain tendencies of the present government (this note was written in 1994), several *matai* created an association to preserve and promote the values underlying the system of belonging constituted by the transmission of the *matai* names. They called it 'Faaiganuu Faamatai' or simply 'Faamatai'; its leitmotiv is the defence of the consensus made possible by the traditional practice of the sacred circle, in contrast to the decisions obtained by majority of votes expressed (Hon. Le Tagaloa Leota P., pers. com.); see below the section on consensus; see the magazine *Poliata Samoa* (n°1, Dec. 1994), published in Apia, which includes pictures of the Hawaiian trip organised by the association; the outcome was the proposal to create an Alliance of Pacific Cultures (see 'Introduction', this vol.). It should be noted in passing that the word *Faiganuu*, like *nuu*, is the basis of a word meaning 'association, organised group' (*fai*: to do, make; *-ga*, noun suffix); the Samoan village, in the sense of *nuu*, is a 'social organisation' first, and only afterwards a geographical site.
- 34 It may be that, in pre-Mission times, there was a distance between *matai* names regarded as *paia*, 'sacred-divine' (which had the right to this title, according to certain informants) and others not qualified as such (is it because they were sufficiently recent for the memory of their creation by another *matai* to have been preserved?) (see Tcherkézoff 2000a, 2000b). Today, and since the mid-nineteenth century, it seems, the term *paia* is applied only to religion (and to the country, since 'Samoa is founded upon God'): 'Samoa' is *paia*, God's 'name' is *paia* (*O le Suafa Paia*) and the Bible is the 'sacred-divine book', *O le Tusi Paia* (but the church building is *falesa*: 'house' = *fale*, 'sacred, forbidden' = *sa*; the term *sa* was and is still used for all prohibitions having to do with the family, the village, the State or religion).
- 35 In both cases, the term 'child' is the one used by a female speaker, the *aiga* family seems therefore to be feminine; the oldest families, who claim divine origin, descend from women who became pregnant through the magical action of a god who had assumed an animal or a human shape.
- 36 We will see that this is exactly what happened in the parliamentary elections, which introduces the possibility of a fundamental transformation.
- 37 See Meleisea (1987: 60), who cites, among others, the remarks of the first German governor, in 1900, Solf, who, three years later, was to create the Land and Title Court (see above, note 28). What Solf called 'communism' was the idea that 'individual ownership' cannot emerge in a system where the 'local authorities' (the *matai*) decide for the individual, even in matters of 'personal welfare' and 'economic development'. The same terms are used today [early 1990s] by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and certain new Samoan civil servants to describe an ongoing debate over private ownership (Tcherkézoff 2003a: chapter 3). One might think that this ideology would have led Solf to lose interest in the *faamatai* or to attempt to do away with it. Here again we find the same balance of power as that encountered by the missionaries in 1830. Compared to the Samoan population, there were never more than a handful of Europeans, even during the German colonial period, and foreign powers never discovered any particular form of wealth in Samoa that might justify military occupation. So they were obliged to get along with the *faamatai*. Furthermore, Solf firmly believed that the only future for the country lay in large-scale coconut plantations (this was why Germany agreed to take possession of these few islands; since 1857, the Hambourg firm Godeffroy, later replaced by the firm Deutesch Handel und Plantagen Gesellschaft, had been earning ever-increasing profits from copra). On this point, he opposed the expansion of small-scale independent planters and tightly reined in the 'purchase' of land by private parties. In the same line of reasoning, he sought to control or to arrive at

- what he judged to be a 'rational organisation' of the succession to the *matai* titles, and therefore to control those who received the authority to manage the lands and, thereby, the authority to grant more-or-less unlimited right of use to a given colonist 'buyer'. For Solf, such control was a means of guiding the economic future (plantations) of the country rather than allowing small-scale free-enterprise to develop. Let me add that purchases by small-scale colonists had already been checked by the Berlin commission after 1889, for the same reasons.
- 38 For this anthropological method of building an ethnography in levels, see Tcherkézoff (2003a: 445–494). This *tapuai* / *fai* distinction touches on a conception central to the whole Samoan culture, which applies to any task, any action (from fishing to waging war, from playing a sport to driving a car; see Tcherkézoff 2003a: chapter 5), and which defines the relationship between power and religion; for instance, the *matai* 'makes power', but it is the family circle which 'makes *tapuai*', and it is the women—as—sisters (of the *matai* name) who best represent this *tapuai* bond with the divine. All aspects of experienced or imagined sexuality are also on the side of *fai* action. In Samoa, sexuality is strictly limited to a conception in terms of *fai* action; it lies outside the sphere of identity-relations, outside the sphere of human relations referring to a shared identity and inscribed around the circumference of the family and village circles — the humans sitting around these circles are all each other's 'brothers-and-sisters' (see Tcherkézoff 1992a, 1993a, 1999a, 2003a: chapters 7–8, n.d.1).
- 39 Marshall Sahlins has already reported this use of the 'heroic I' in Oceania and elsewhere, where the teller relives in a historical present the story of the hero (his ancestor) so vividly that not only is the action narrated in the present, but the subject of the action becomes no longer 'he' but 'I' (see Sahlins 1987: 47).
- 40 Throughout this section I intentionally stress the *faamatai* as a system of ancestor worship and the *aiga* as a cult group articulated around a genealogy, in order to correct the image usually conveyed by the literature of an aristocratic society with a system of chiefly families. But notions which, expressed in this way, look like 'religious' concepts can very well be part of the social morphology and even furnish the fundamental scaffolding for the whole social organisation (we once would have said that they 'can function as an "infrastructure"'); see Godelier 1978) — the Indian caste system is there as proof (see Dumont 1966; Tcherkézoff 1994b, Part Two).
- 41 A little shading is in order here. A number of great *matai* names are linked with a territory in several villages (as a result of past wars, marriage strategies) and are the source of numerous other *matai* names whose founding house stands in these villages. Succession to these great names requires that the representatives of all these villages meet together. Furthermore, since the beginning of the twentieth century, there is, over and above the village, the *malo*, the government, as I have already said, but this *malo* theoretically is not above the *faamatai* (see above, section on national identity; also notes 28 and 30). Until now it has not had authority over the *faamatai* when it comes to titles, but this may come about if a separate political class grows up (see below). Meanwhile, the contradiction already exists in the area of criminal law (see below).
- 42 Or, in the other direction, he may be made to feel that he would do better to sit here rather than there, and the principal *matai* of the moment will tell the bearer of the kava bowl to serve this *matai* after having served others who used to be brought their kava after the *matai* in question. One may wonder whether the disappearance of the qualification 'sacred-divine', *paia*, for certain *matai* names (if indeed it did exist as such) did not exacerbate the rivalry and fluctuation. The notion of a 'great' name (significantly this is almost always expressed in Samoan with an added English qualifier: 'high chief'), which often refers to the two or three principal *matai* of the village (who bear the 'founding' names and sit against the most esteemed posts), designates merely, when the discussion takes place at the country-wide level, names with a very old genealogy (going back over fifteen or twenty successive *matai*). Furthermore, the few names resulting from more recent wars and, in part, from the post-contact era, are 'great' and even 'very great' names, and have received (no one knows precisely when) a special qualifier (*Tama a Aiga*, 'the children of the families [of Samoa]'). A number of *matai* challenge these qualifiers, maintaining that this supreme status is recent, at least in the case of certain names, and that the 'founding' families of Samoa are, in any event, other names (See Aiono 1992 for examples, and So'o 1996 for an historical study of the Tama Aiga complex).
- 43 Here a number of explanations would be needed. First of all, some people say that 'the two village *nuu*' are the *matai* and the daughters (and sisters, and aunts, etc.): *nuu o matai ma nuu o tamaitai*. The third group is also constituent of the *nuu*, but it is rarely called 'the *nuu* of ... (the boys, etc.)': it is called 'the strength of the village', in the service of the two other *nuu*, their *matai* and their sisters and paternal aunts. The fourth group

- is a complicated affair. First of all, this group is a constituent part of the village inasmuch as these women carry on collective activities, but for some, this does not make it a *nuu* because wives are not members of the village (in the sense of members of the ‘circle’ of *matai* names). And secondly, the discussion concerns only the wives of *matai*, for the rest, the wives of non-*matai*, do not form an official group but are integrated into their husband’s household (if the couple lives with his parents, which is far from always being the case when the husband is, precisely, not a *matai*), where they do many of the chores (the same may be symmetrically true if the couple goes to live with the wife’s family, the non-*matai* husband may be given the heaviest household chores to do; see Tcherkézoff n.d.1).
- 44 This touches on the fundamental opposition between the Samoan representation of gender categories between the woman from the village (a ‘sister’) and the woman-as-wife (see Schoeffel 1978, 1995; Shore 1981; Tcherkézoff *op. cit.* see above note 38).
- 45 For more on this period, see the bibliography in Freeman 1983 (which lists the most important titles), or for the specialist in search of more complete information, Pereira 1983. [The very first accounts of the ‘circular’ form of Samoan villages and houses date back to 1787, with the arrival of the Lapérouse expedition: Tcherkézoff (2004: 45 note 22).
- 46 See M. Godelier (this vol., Chap 1).
- 47 See above, notes 6 and 38.
- 48 See above, note 37.
- 49 The movement thus begins in the expected way. But surprises can crop up, such as, for example, when to the relationship between the *faamatai* and religion (or economy, politics), is added an unexpected relationship between the *faamatai* and gender categories: any distinction between the genders is in contradiction with the *faamatai* since, in the latter, social position is independent of the person’s gender, even if, in fact, huge statistical majorities appear, such as the fact that 90 per cent of the *matai* are men.
- 50 See Turner (1884) and Stair (1897).
- 51 See Cain (1979), Monberg 1991. According to Aiono, the pre-Christian demiurge of Samoa, Tagaloa, was invoked as an *atua*, which is what one would expect in view of the relationship Cain’s comparison (1979) seems to indicate: the *aitu* are more or less ‘over there’, while the *atua* are more or less ‘up above’; Tagaloa inhabited the sky, the local *aitu* spirits inhabited and still inhabit the villages or its outskirts, or the forest, or the sea.
- 52 I base my remarks on comparison between the present-day situation and missionary reports (see Pereira 1983 for a bibliography) as well as on Aiono’s opinion (com. pers.), who, as a child, heard her grandparents talk about prayer practices and use words which were a legacy of the pre-Christian era. What has not changed in the way of praying is this: people pray at transitional moments, between day and night (at dusk and dawn), between the cosmological Day and Night; people pray in the home, making the sacred circle, and therefore organising the seating and speaking orders (for petitioning God, for giving thanks, for starting a hymn then taken up by the group) such that the relationship with God goes through the group hierarchy: younger–elder–*matai*–God, affines–consanguines–*matai*–God, sister–brother–*matai*–God, and so on; the gas lamp has replaced the fire that once burned at the centre of the house and which was part of the offering — which consisted in making the flame shoot up, *fanaafi* (Turner 1861: 166: ‘A flaming fire was the regular evening offering to the gods, as the family bowed the head, and the fathers prayed for prosperity’; Aiono Dr. Fanaafi, personal communication; see Aiono 1996 and Aiono-Le Tagaloa 2003) — but people have kept the same arrangement, the same gestures and the idea that ‘light’ rises up to God (and in post-contact times, that ‘light’ keeps the spirits away). On the whole, the Samoan religious discourse is still much more aligned on the opposition night/day (with a few changes in the nature of this opposition, see below) than on oppositions familiar to Western Christianity (between Good and Evil or between life ‘on earth’ and life in the ‘hereafter’, between ‘body’ and ‘soul’, between the material and the spiritual, etc.).
- 53 Everyone is familiar with the name because it is also a *matai* name; but few know that it used to designate the pre-Christian creator (*Tagaloa-a-Lagi*: Tagaloa-in-the-sky).
- 54 Man, *tagata*, was created by God: that is what the Bible says, and that is also what the pre-Christian myths say about Tagaloa (Turner 1884). The myths have been forgotten. The first myth, on the other hand, presupposes God’s presence and therefore already the time of light. Through a sort of anachronistic compromise, the pre-light men were thus represented as both ‘men’ — since Samoa existed before the arrival of Christianity (see below, the Samoan representation of this arrival) — and ‘spirits’: *afa tagata afa aitu* (*afa*: ‘half’).

- 55 On the pre-Christian system, see Tcherkézoff (2003a: chapter 1; 2004: chapter 9). Once it was decided (probably by the missionaries) that the word *agaga* would designate the 'soul', spirits were also called 'bad souls' — *agaga leaga* with some ambiguity as to the term *leaga* which still exists today: sometimes it means 'bad', as in a discourse infused with moralism imported from the West, and sometimes it retains its initial meaning: 'that which is not of the order of things of the Daytime world': *le-aga*; likewise, *agaga* could be a redoubling of *aga*1: 'that which defines the essence of' the being or the thing one is talking about; 'its place in the order of the Daytime world'. The missionary, Turner, points out that the concept of *agaga* already existed and designated a spiritual principle of the individual, which, at the time of death, left the body for the Island-of-the-Dead, Puluotu; he proposes the etymology: verb stem *aga* 2, 'to go or to come' (Turner 1884: 16), which is most certainly an erroneous etymology, for the word *aga*2 means something more like 'to confront, to go towards, to challenge, defy', and its redoubling carries the connotation of 'rebellion' (see Milner 1996:8).
- 56 The case of Samoa is therefore different from the 'syncretism' practised in French Polynesia (see the case of the Australes, in Babadzan 1982: 246ff).
- 57 One little-known aspect of this change concerns male sexuality, which was and still is of the 'night' (here as elsewhere in Polynesia, see Grépin 1995, 2001). The connotation of value remains, but the user's guide has been lost (the powers of Night, *Po*, wild powers which must be tamed so they may serve the group). Hence the dichotomy felt by adolescent males, who are given to understand that it is good to 'spill their seed', and at the same time that sexual intercourse belongs to the 'nocturnal', 'bad' realm when it occurs outside marriage (which is entirely on the side of 'daytime or light'). Generally speaking, the effect of this dichotomy, induced by the integration of Christianity and its local adaptations, had a far greater impact on the representations of gender, sexuality, etc., than on those of the hierarchy of social positions as related to ancestral names in the *faamatai* (see below for marriage and the status of women).
- 58 'In the Holy Name of God, The Almighty, The Ever Loving,
Whereas sovereignty over the Universe belongs to the Omnipresent God alone, and the authority to be exercised by the people of Western Samoa within the limits prescribed by His commandments is a sacred heritage
Whereas the Leaders of Western Samoa have declared that Western Samoa should be an Independent State based on Christian principles and Samoan custom and tradition ... we the people of Western Samoa give ourselves this Constitution.'
- 59 The London Missionary Society (today the Congregational Christian Church of Western Samoa) is the largest (50 per cent of all Church members), but it is loosing membership. The other Churches present from the outset are the Catholic Church (25 per cent) and the Methodist Church (15 per cent). These three Churches have always worked through the *matai* system and are therefore regarded as 'traditional' by the new Churches. A fourth, more recent but well-established Church is the Mormons (8 per cent), followed by the Seventh-Day Adventists (3 per cent). The last two are something of middle-of-the-roaders in the *faamatai* individualism.
- 60 There is yet another circumstance. The missionaries had been preceded by various European adventurers, some of whom had established their authority (and guaranteed they would be well fed) by preaching a 'new' religion and waving the Bible. And, as throughout Polynesia, one idea was already central to the culture: the gods are former 'chiefs', the living chiefs have the *mana* (mystical power) once possessed by their ancestors, the victorious chiefs always come from somewhere else (another district, another island), and therefore it is always good and even desirable to integrate a god who comes from somewhere else. The power demonstrated by certain objects and knowledge in the possession of the Europeans helped accredit the power of the god they preached (see Turner 1861: 11; for other South Pacific examples, see Sahlins 1987: 37–38).
- 61 See Turner (1861: 145–146).
- 62 The New Testament was translated, verified and printed in 1850 (Turner 1861: 76–77).
- 63 Turner, writing around 1860, gives the figure of 35,000 (Turner 1861: 3), which, if accurate, would mean that, until the 1920s, the population remained stable (See HWS: 133; Meleisea 1987: 121) or rose by only 20 per cent (percentage of the deaths during the 1918 influenza epidemic; cf. HWS, *op. cit.*), as the 1921 census shows a population of 33,000 Samoans. It is true that the intensive health programs did not get under way until somewhere around this time. Samoa was fortunate in that the Mission did not arrive in the baggage of an army in search of a 'new world' to conquer. And that luck held, since Samoa has never been occupied by a

colonial army (with the exception of the period during the short-lived Mau uprising against New Zealand mandate; see Field 1991). It should also be kept in mind that the number of missionaries never exceeded ten for the entire country.

- 64 This was Malietoa Vainupo (of the 'Malietoa' title, which is the title of the present head of State; see above, the section on national identity). For the legend, see Meleisea 1987: 13. The familiar part of the legend concerns the prophesy and the presence of Malietoa. Alternatively, the gift of the term *feagaiga* and the creation of the title *Faafeagaiga* are not as widely known (Aiono, pers. com.); today everyone knows and uses the honourific title *Faafeagaiga* for the pastor, but no one seems to know where it came from.
- 65 See (Schoeffel 1979, Chaps. 9–10).
- 66 Turner worked in Samoa from 1840 to 1859. The first missionaries, Williams and Barff, arrived in 1830 with eight teachers from Tahiti. In 1836, the London Missionary Society sent six missionaries together with a number of teachers, who divided the country into districts of between 3,000 and 5,000 inhabitants and trained local 'teachers' as they could. When Turner began work in 1840, he had 15 teachers for his district and preached with them in 16 villages. In 1844, the missionaries opened a theological seminary (Malua). In 1859, 131 teachers had successfully completed the course; 70 were preaching in Samoa, the rest in missions further to the west (Tuvalu, Melanesia), and 70 were still in training. In 1859, there were 10 missionaries and 212 native teachers working in the field (see Turner 1861, Chap. 1–7). In passing I would point out the very rapid Samoanisation of the pastoral personnel: all these teachers were assigned a village and became its pastor (we should bear in mind that the New Testament appeared in Samoan translation in 1850, thanks to the unflinching efforts of Pratt, Turner, Murray, Nisbet, etc.); this explains that Samoans have long considered Christianity as part of their tradition. It also explains that the Christianity which was established in Samoa was the result of *interpretation* of the Bible by the Samoans who became teachers.
- 67 See Turner (1861: 19).
- 68 See Turner (1861: 32). In 1859, the 'members of the institution' (apparently trained in Malua and working in Samoa) numbered '70 teachers, 50 women, the wives of the teachers, 36 young non-Samoans, 98 children' (Turner 1861:33).
- 69 Turner (1861: 37). Was it the same ideology that led Turner to take on 'six male and six female' servants to help with household chores 'during nearly the whole time we spent in Samoa' (1861: 21)?
- 70 The distinctive division of humanity into two genders is comparable to the animal kingdom. In the Samoan culture, once outside the *faamatai*, 'living beings' (*mea ola*) are reduced to a world made only of 'males and females'; but this view begins precisely only where the *faamatai* leaves off: outside the circles of identity (Tcherkézoff 2003a: chapter 7, 475–478, 490–493).
- 71 This is a typical case: village exogamy is respected — which is still the general rule — and the couple's residence is virilocal, something which varies much more depending on the standing of the 'two families' *matai* names (furthermore, if the husband is already a *matai* or becomes one, the couple usually lives on the land that goes with the title; if this is not the case, the choice of residence is far more open).
- 72 See Turner (1861: 23, 67). The missionaries thus contributed largely to keeping the *matai's pule* authority separate from the authority of the pastors — all this being consistent with the fact that a Samoan who became a pastor could not at the same time lay claim to a *matai* title and, if he held one, was obliged to give it up.
- 73 Turner (1861: 64–67, author's stress). These anecdotes also show how ambivalent the representation of the pastor figure was and still is: on the one hand, he is 'as a sacred sister' of the village and is called, on ceremonial occasions, *O le Faafeagaiga* — he is presented with gifts of food; on the other hand, as the missionaries would explain, following their logic of reciprocity, he does a job — and he must be given money. The second aspect is probably the origin of the other common term for pastor, which surprises at first: *o le faifeau*, from *fai*, 'to do' and *feau*, 'job, task' (*feau*, the thing to do, a task or chore, an occupation, business, in the sense of 'mind your own business', the errand one is running, or the message one is carrying: the Pastor 'brought the Good Message', of course, but in a way of 'doing a job'). The same ambivalence can be found in the relationship between *matai* and pastor. For some things, the pastor's decision is supposed to prevail in the event of conflict because he 'knows', through communication with God, what is supposed to be. For others, the *matai's* decisions prevail, because the pastor, like the non-*matai* men in the village, is one of those who 'does' (the work), and not one of those who can sit in the 'sacred circle of the *matai*' of the village (for examples of conflicts of authorities between the Pastor and the *matai*, see Tcherkézoff 2003a: 220–227).
- 74 See Tcherkézoff (*op. cit.* above in note 38).

- 75 The phenomenon is a recent one and affects the generation of 40–50 year-olds, whereas the Samoan pastor has been, as everyone knows, a figure of the society since 1850. This goes to show just how great an impact intensification of monetary circulation and access to Western learning (English) must have had on this evolution. Today there can be a world of difference between a retired pastor who has spent his whole life in a little village on Savaii and speaks only a few words of English and a Church administrator who works at headquarters in Apia, speaks fluent English and drives a 4 x 4 imported at great expense.
- 76 One big cannery employs a large workforce in eastern Samoa; the salaries are incommensurate with those paid in the western part; it is heavily subsidised by the United States; obviously Western Samoans try to get work permits for Eastern Samoa, but these are granted sparingly.
- 77 For mats (or tapa) and the role of exchanges in Western Polynesia, see this vol., Chap. 9, on Tonga, by F. Douaire-Marsaudon. Samoa is essentially no different (Tcherkézoff 2002).
- 78 The traditional gift of cooked food wrapped in leaves may have led to admission of the first canned products into the circuit. These cans — and only these — are called ‘white men’s tins’ (*apa papalagi*), whereas the other cans are simply ‘tins of XX [the product name]’ (on *papalagi*, see above, note 16).
- 79 For a recent overview of what is known about Austronesian languages, see Tryon ed. (1995).
- 80 See Wilson (1982).
- 81 For the kin terms, the reader will be wondering about the descendants: ‘my son, my daughter, ‘etc.’: this is in effect the sole exception, but only if the subject of the stated ownership is female! (In the Samoan linguistic unconscious, the father is therefore not the origin of his offspring; we understand this when we realise that the father uses a terminology related to the succession of *matai* names, which is not the case with the mother.)
- 82 See Tcherkézoff (1992b, Introduction).
- 83 It should be kept in mind that the extended family includes everyone who can and wants to be connected with a founder’s name. But only some of these people live on the founding land.
- 84 ‘These great circular roofs are so constructed that they can be lifted bodily off the posts, and removed anywhere, either by land or by a raft of canoes.’ Yet these roofs can be huge (60 metres in circumference) and, Turner adds, in this case, they are dismantled into four parts, moved and then reassembled, because a Samoan house does not use any nails (everything is fitted together and lashed with cords made of braided strips of coconut bark). ‘As Samoan houses often form presents, fines, dowries, as well as articles of barter, they are frequently removed from place to place’ (Turner 1861: 164–165).
- 85 See Tcherkézoff (1992b, enlarged in 2003a: chapter 3).
- 86 See Tcherkézoff (1992b, Introduction).
- 87 There is a vast ongoing debate on this; the government even called in an American anthropologist, whose analysis tended to conclude that the sense of private property had become widespread. See Tcherkézoff (2003a: chapter 3) on this and for a critique of the analysis, which confuses two things: by tradition, children stay (if they so wish), where their father lived, but on condition, as we have said, that they routinely demonstrate their membership in the extended family; however this has nothing to do with the growing sense of private property (a new phenomenon, which appeared and is growing in the case of permanent houses with enclosed gardens).
- 88 The fact that he can be dismissed apparently dates far back, since the missionaries found this practice already established when they arrived (Turner 1861: 190).
- 89 See above, the paragraph corresponding to note 36.
- 90 We cannot go into further detail: the text of the Constitution is deliberately vague, but it uses the word ‘election’, and stipulates, in so many words this time, the majority rule in the case of parliamentary decisions. Furthermore, a number of ways and means were defined by law a short time later (Tcherkézoff 2003a: chapter 6).
- 91 See Turner (1861: 25).
- 92 Here too the text of the Constitution is incomplete. To be sure, it makes a distinction between election by the list of individual voters and election by the list of ‘districts’; the second notion implies representation by land and not by individual voter, and therefore by the *matai*. But this is not stated in so many words. The question did not even come up at Independence. But it does today: Is it ‘unconstitutional’ to have introduced by law (after the 1990 referendum) universal suffrage for electors, as the present opposition to the government claims and wants to have recognised by a court of law? [This present tense refers to the early 1990s]. The

- answer is 'Yes' if everything is made to rest on the question of the *aiga* land as the condition of political representativity. It is 'No' if one is looking for one sentence of the Constitution which would explicitly state that the only admissible electors are the *matai* (Tcherkézoff 2003a: 230–244).
- 93 From *fai*, 'to do'; the term was inherited from the earlier 'native' administration.
- 94 On the exchange of arguments about the referendum, see Tcherkézoff (1998). The question of gender distinction is clearly more complex. Furthermore, under the impact of the value assigned by the missionaries to the husband–wife pair (see above), the division of roles between persons and lines descended from a brother or a sister was weakened or blurred in a number of families. There too it is easy to glimpse a boundary line: the day when, in each family, no distinction is any longer made between a brother and a sister as candidates for the succession to the charge of *matai* will be the day there is a good chance that the role has become purely folkloric. Only as long as this role is governed by the logic of sacred/action, *tapuailfai* will it continue to be part of the *faamatai* characterizing the long-term historical period in Samoa described in this chapter, which is still at work in this society today [until what I could see in my last extended stay, in 1994].
- 95 The statistics are not broken down by gender, so this remark is based on numerous discussions with Samoans in the vicinity of Apia and in northwestern Upolu, the most 'urbanized' zone, which now accounts for over one quarter of the country's population; its weight was absolutely decisive in the referendum, as the more remote zones had a high abstention rate (owing also to the fact that registering to vote was difficult and a completely new phenomenon for villagers, and the government had left little time to register and obtain a voting card).
- 96 It is striking to see how, in the recent years (early 1980s to early 1990s), a number of political parties have been created (with the practice of blocks of votes controlled by the party). This has greatly changed the functioning of Samoa's Parliament.
- 97 In ordinary language, the phonemes *t* and *k* sound alike, so *polokiki* is an entirely adequate transcription of the word *poliiti*; in Polynesian languages a consonant must be followed by a vowel.
- 98 See MacPherson (1997), Tcherkézoff (2003a: 250–251).
- 99 We are familiar with this logic for the chieftom of pre-colonial Hawaii (Valeri 1985).
- 100 Traditionally, in choosing a successor to a 'great' name, war was the only alternative if rival families persisted in their disagreement. When it comes to those names whose origin goes back to the gods and is lost in the cosmogony, there is no higher authority (in this matter, Samoa was very different from Tonga; see Douaire-Marsaudon 1998a). In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Europeans in Apia, with their 'consuls' and their constant reference to the Kaiser or the King of England, had introduced the idea of a higher authority, which German colonisation merely actualised; it was able to do this because the first Governor (Solf) and the High Court judge (Schultz) were both local residents and familiar with the *faasamoa*.
- 101 This can be clearly seen in the division of powers between the Head of State and the Prime Minister. The Head of State, even though he is literally called as such (*Ao o le Malo*), is universally regarded as the supreme *matai* of the country (see above, Part One, on the appointment of Malietoa in 1962 and the plans for the future [it would still today be unthinkable that the Parliament would elect to this position a *matai* holding a middle ranking title]), while the Prime Minister may even hold an altogether middle-ranking *matai* name, even if he will try to have other higher titles be conferred on him as he goes on. This distinction appeared twenty or so years after independence, like the other phenomena discussed here and which followed: generalised voting, the notion of political career, etc. But, in the 1960s, at the start, it seemed obvious that the Prime Minister too should be chosen from among the country's 'great' *matai* (for a comparison between France and Samoa concerning the division of powers between Heads of State and Prime Ministers, see Tcherkézoff 1993b, part Two, and 1996).
- 102 We have used this notion of combination several times. There is not room here for a more thorough discussion, but the reader can refer to Jocelyn Linnekin's excellent article (1991a), which stresses a common error in historical anthropological work on cultural change: the desire to choose between an analysis that starts with the 'global' system and goes on to study the local consequences, and another system which starts with the local culture and observes how this culture interprets events. Yet it is only by combining the two that one can understand — this is the object of Linnekin's article — why contact produced totally different results in Hawaii and Samoa. What has been said here about religion, for example, may shed a complementary light on the subject. The Hawaiian 'taboos' were clearly visible to outsiders: these were in the form of cult objects or the many prohibitions organising the separation between men and women. Breaking these objects or

causing men and women to eat together, if only once, introduced an irreversibly new factor. But in Samoa, as we have said, the genealogy is the cult object. And even more generally it can be said that, in Samoa, the taboos are essentially in the words: a huge portion of the social organisation is conveyed by the obligatory distinction (on pain of 'shame' and punishment) between levels of speech (in the vocabulary and even in the phonetic system), as has been clearly shown by the ethno-linguistic studies of Duranti (1981, 1994) and Ochs (1988).

¹⁰³It should be noted once more, especially in regard to the pages describing the political situation, that this chapter was written in 1994–1995.